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# HOME CINEMA Choice

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Start your engines for bigscreen gaming, p28

# WELCOME

When I read that celebrated artist H. R. Giger had passed away recently, my mind naturally turned to his work in the world of cinema, particularly the *Alien* franchise. The set and creature designs of this surrealist Swiss genius surely helped raise the spectacle of Ridley Scott's sci-fi horror, and its sequels, to another level.



**Good design, in other words, can have a real impact**, yet I do sometimes wonder whether the AV industry gives it enough concern. Yes, user interfaces are improving, but the hardware itself is all beginning to look a bit... samey. When was the last time you were bowled over by a flatscreen TV? Around five years ago, when the push was toward thinner and thinner screens, product design was getting exciting. Now, it seems to be treading water. What to do? I don't know – but the first brand to design a flatscreen in the shape of a Xenomorph gets a thumbs up from me!

*Mark Craven*  
Editor



# MENU



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# BULLETIN

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## Musical obsession

Naim Muso → [www.naimaudio.com](http://www.naimaudio.com)



British brand Naim Audio is taking a break from more traditional AV products this September with the launch of the Muso wireless music system. Priced at £895, the Naim Muso boasts six 75W digital amplifiers powering six custom-designed drivers (two dome tweeters, two midrangers and two 'racetrack' bass drivers). As well as its 24-bit/192kHz streaming capabilities, the inclusion of an optical digital input means that the Muso can be used as a particularly swanky soundbar. No wonder Naim Audio just won its third Queen's Award for Innovation...

### HCC ONLINE...

Looking for breaking AV news, blogs, features, & reviews? For your daily fix visit us at [www.homecinemachoice.com](http://www.homecinemachoice.com) Follow us on Twitter @hccmag

# Balanced bar

Q Acoustics Media 4 → [www.qacoustics.co.uk](http://www.qacoustics.co.uk)



Audio specialist Q Acoustics launches its latest soundbar this month. The £400 Media 4 uses a 2.1-channel configuration, with twin 2.5in BMR (Balanced Mode Radiator) drivers promising to deliver an 'ultra wide' dispersion, while bass is handled by dual downward-firing woofers. The Media 4 doesn't include an HDMI input but does provide digital optical, plus a 3.5mm mini jack and a pair of phono sockets. Wireless music streaming is also on offer thanks to the inclusion of aptX Bluetooth.



## Feature-packed deck



On the hunt for an affordable Blu-ray player that doesn't skimp on features? Well, Pioneer's latest entry-level deck – the BDP-170 – will set you back just £150 and promises plenty of streaming options thanks to built-in Wi-Fi and Miracast connectivity. The deck is also fully compatible with a wide array of file types (including FLV, MPEG, AVI, WMV, FLAC, WMA, MP3, MKV and DivX Plus HD), supports SACD playback and comes equipped with a two-channel 192 kHz/24-bit DAC. [www.pioneer.co.uk](http://www.pioneer.co.uk)

## Super-thin soundbar



Humax has taken a short break from its usual output of digital set-top boxes to take the plunge into the TV audio market with what it claims is 'the world's slimmest soundbar.' The waif-like STA-1200 BSW may only be 20mm deep, but the brand promises 80W across the soundbar's four front speakers. This is backed up by a separate 100W passive subwoofer, which is included in the £200 price tag. As is increasingly commonplace these days, the STA-1200 BSW also supports Bluetooth audio streaming. [www.humaxdigital.com/uk](http://www.humaxdigital.com/uk)

## 4K streaming box



Sony has revealed that owners of its 2012/2013 4K TVs and projectors will soon be able to take advantage of live streaming 4K content. Sony's FMP-X5 media player has been designed to add support for the HEVC (High Efficiency Video Coding) codec to its KDL-84X9005, KD-65X9005A and KD-55X9005A TVs and VPL-VW500 and VPL-VW1000 projectors. At the very least, this means early adopters can get a 4K fix via Netflix when the FMP-X5 touches down in August, priced around €399. [www.sony.co.uk](http://www.sony.co.uk)

# Toshiba targets pro displays

As the TV market stagnates, brand looks to pro 4K displays for growth

Toshiba is getting serious about the pro display market. With TV sales predicted to slide over the coming year, the move into professional AV would seem nothing if not timely. 'Some markets are stagnating or declining. We believe that the way to maintain our presence is to diversify and look at the B2B area,' Liam LaCumbre, the new division's Director of Sales, told HCC.

LaCumbre is no stranger to the turbulent waters of high street telly sales, having already spent nine years with the brand's TV business. 'We have the infrastructure and the product in place to do it. Of course, they are distinctly different businesses. It would be foolhardy to think you can just introduce a retail TV business into the commercial sector and expect to be successful.'

Toshiba may have been slow to throw its weight behind professional displays – after all, key rivals such as Samsung, LG, Sony and Panasonic have all found niches with high-spec panels – but things have been moving fast behind the scenes. 'About a year ago we started to have proper earnest dialogue with Tokyo about entering,' reveals LaCumbre. 'I guess it's a case of better late than never. Still the market is only really starting to gain momentum...'

### Technical innovations

The Japanese tech giant certainly has the chops to make an impact. It was the first brand to launch Ultra HD and technical trickery isn't in short supply. Incoming innovations include a 'superwide' 32:9 format panel and a 32in 4K/Ultra HD monitor.



**Liam LaCumbre:** 'It would be foolhardy to think you can just introduce a retail TV business into the commercial sector'

'The monitor is a specialist photography product,' reveals LaCumbre. 'With the growth of Ultra HD we would see this as the right time to bring this technology to market. It's ideal for photo studios, recording studios, things like that.'

The AV manufacturer expects future growth will be driven by Ultra HD. 'The product line up we've got going forward will be focused on developing and bringing through 4K in all shapes and sizes,' reveals LaCumbre. He adds that the brand is also ramping up research and development into low energy consumption displays, technology which could have far reaching implications.

'A lot of our pro AV displays have an eco message; we're keen to develop low energy type usage. Within Toshiba, eco and power-saving are massively important areas. It's part of our DNA.'



Toshiba's 'superwide' 32:9 P32LC12 panel in action

## PLAYLIST...

Team HCC spins up its disc picks of the month

### X-Men Trilogy (Region B BD)

The recent cinema release of *X-Men: Days of Future Past* had us rushing back to the original trilogy to savour the highs and lows of Marvel's mutants in hi-def.



### Gravity 3D (All-region BD)



The breathtaking AV credentials of this 3D sci-fi smash continue to impress with every viewing. Pure home cinema heaven.

### The War Lord (Region B BD)



This cracking historical adventure starring Charlton Heston gets an utterly gorgeous hi-def outing courtesy of Eureka! Entertainment.

### Veep: Season Two (All-region BD)



Armando Iannucci's satire of US politics continues to bring the big laughs with this latest release.

### The Cat Returns (Region B BD)



The underrated Studio Ghibli 'toon might finally get more recognition thanks to this lovely Blu-ray edition.

## EXTRAS...

Small items that make a big impression

### Amazing Spider-Man 2 life-size statue



This truly amazing life-size Spider-Man statue designed by Studio Oxmox and Muckle Mannequins

stands a whopping 63in tall (or 96in with the optional base) and will set you back an equally grand \$2,900 (\$3,500 with the base).

### Alien novels



UK publisher Titan is reprinting Alan Dean Foster's celebrated novelisations of the first three *Alien* films, priced at £7.99 each.

### The Art of Rio



This lavish hardback book celebrates the 'carnival of art' created during the production of Blue Sky Studios' *Rio* and *Rio 2* animated smash hits. Yours for £25.

### LEGO Ghostbusters



The seventh addition to the LEGO Cusoo design project

range celebrates the 30th anniversary of the spooktacular smash with a model of the Ectomobile accompanied by four Ghostbuster mini-figures.

# The age of collectors isn't over

As Amazon's streaming service gathers pace, disc sales keep on growing

Pundits continually debate the demise of physical media, but online shopping goliath Amazon believes the era of the collector is far from over. 'People often talk about the death of physical music, but our physical music sales grow year on year,' spokesman Paul Woodmansey told *HCC*.

'People just like to have titles on their shelf, they like to own things. We introduced AutoRip (which automatically gifts an MP3 copy of any music media bought) specifically because we're not looking to kill CD. Customers tell us they still want physical media. It's no different to how it used to be. If a film was on TV on a Sunday night, we would see an upsurge in sales of the DVD the following Monday.'

Of course, Amazon is also a major player in the VOD market. Explaining the evolution of LoveFilm into Amazon Prime Instant Video, Woodmansey says it was this thinking that led the service to combine an all-you-can-eyeball subscription deal with a *la carte* downloads. 'It's a real advance over rival services in that you can download to your device to watch when you're not online. Our attitude is that if our customers want it, we'll offer it. It'll be interesting to see how many customers stream a movie as part of their subscription, then love it so much that they buy it because they want to own it.'

The transition from LoveFilm was also more than just a marketing manoeuvre. The entire streaming operation shifted to the Global Amazon



**Paul Woodmansey:** 'People just like to have titles on their shelf... Customers tell us they still want physical media'

technology server platform, which was actually crafted at Amazon's London Development Centre.

As a result there's far greater integration with Amazon's Kindle device family. Woodmansey cites one example wherein metadata from the IMDB can be referenced as you watch. 'People were doing this anyway, watching TV and using their phones, so we've integrated it into the service,' explains Sophie Ponderoso, Kindle PR manager. And unlike Netflix, Amazon Prime Instant Video looks and behaves differently depending on the device used. 'We see that as an advantage,' argues Ponderoso, 'we specifically look to each device to see how we can present the best interface.'

### What about 4K?

With 15,000 titles available, Amazon Prime Instant Video currently claims to be the UK's biggest subscription service. But for further growth, it's turning to original content production, and hasn't ruled out introducing a 4K stream. 'We're filming all studio content in 4K now,' Woodmansey confirms. 'This doesn't apply to acquisitions such as *Black Sails*, but the next round of series produced by Amazon Studios will all be in 4K.'



Watch and read on the go with Amazon Prime

# Onkyo expands the mid-range

New 7.2-channel models look to video's 4K future and audio's analogue past

Onkyo has given its mid-range AVR lineup a boost with its new THX Select2 Plus-certified TX-NR737 and TX-NR838 (pictured) 7.2-channel models.

Like the TX-NR626 before them, both receivers are compatible with HDCP 2.2, allowing them to be used in playing copy-protected 4K video. The new AV receivers also boast Wi-Fi and DLNA functionality, supporting a variety of file formats including 5.6MHz DSD, Dolby TrueHD and 192-kHz/24-bit FLAC and WAV. Further wireless streaming options are available via Bluetooth.

Onkyo also promises that you can connect your record player to enjoy 'interference-free playback'

of your vinyl collection, thanks to its optional Pure Direct Analogue Path, which physically shuts down all digital circuitry in the receivers.

Both also offer seven HDMI inputs (six rear and one front with MHL), with five supporting 4K video at 60 frames per second.

The TX-NR737 and TX-NR838 are available now, priced £800 and £1,000 respectively.

The TX-NR838 can also supply HD video to a second zone







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- Jeff Fritz, SoundStage! Network (October, 2013)

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## DIARY

Our calendar ensures that you don't miss out...

## → MAY

**30: A Million Ways to Die in the West**

*Family Guy* and *Ted* creator Seth MacFarlane returns to cinemas with this comedy set in the Wild West. Could it be the new *Blazing Saddles*? [www.universalpictures.co.uk](http://www.universalpictures.co.uk)

## → JUNE

**02: Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit**

Chris Pine stars in this action-packed franchise reboot for author Tom Clancy's popular CIA analyst. Track down a copy on Blu-ray and DVD. [www.paramountpictures.co.uk](http://www.paramountpictures.co.uk)

**03: Digital Home World Summit**

The Mövenpick Hotel in Berlin's Potsdamer Platz area will be playing host to this two-day trade event discussing the latest solutions and technologies for connected homes. [www.digitalhomeworldsummit.com](http://www.digitalhomeworldsummit.com)

**06: 22 Jump Street**

Jonah Hill and Channing Tatum are back on the bigscreen as undercover cops Schmidt and Jenko when this sequel to the hilarious 2012 comedy hits UK cinemas. [www.sonypictures.co.uk](http://www.sonypictures.co.uk)

**09: Lone Survivor**

Mark Wahlberg stars in this film adapted from the non-fiction book of the same name about a SEAL team trapped in enemy territory. Pick it up on DVD and Blu-ray [www.universalpictures.co.uk](http://www.universalpictures.co.uk)

**13: Oculus**

Fancy some chills to keep you cool this Summer? Then pop along to the cinema and catch former *Doctor Who* companion Karen Gillan in this creepy flick about a haunted mirror. [www.warnerbros.co.uk](http://www.warnerbros.co.uk)

**14: InfoComm 2014 Show**

The world's largest pro AV event gets underway once again at the Las Vegas Convention Center. Seven days of conferences are joined by three days of exhibition, showcasing the hottest new products from more than 950 companies. [www.infocommshow.org](http://www.infocommshow.org)

**26: HCC #236**

The next issue of your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands today, packed with hardware tests, features, outspoken opinion and in-depth software reviews. [www.homecinemachoice.com](http://www.homecinemachoice.com)

## Home automation for all?

Affordable app-controlled system promises non-invasive installation

Outside of the humble teasmade and the odd universal remote control, home automation has been somewhat elusive to the majority of the population, unable to afford bespoke custom installations of the kind we often drool over in *HCC*.

After all, who wouldn't want to turn off their Sonos by hitting their light switch, or view a picture of every person who rings their doorbell?

So we were more than ready to catch up with Fibaro at the recent *Grand Designs*

Live exhibition where the company, which hails from Poland, launched its range of app-controlled home automation gear. Technical director Daniel Knight demonstrated the Fibaro system, which is available in modular form. 'All you need to get going is a Home Centre controller and one of our control modules,' says Knight. A basic Home Centre Lite controller is priced at £250, with modules priced around £50, including sensors for flooding, motion, door/window opening and roller shutter control.

Most modules can be easily retro-fitted in a non-invasive way. Sensors for light, motion, etc are battery-operated while light dimmers, which let you alter the lighting from a different location as well as set automatic on/off patterns, can be inserted into a light switch. 'It's really no more complex than wiring a plug,' says Knight. 'all you need is a screwdriver.' Each Home Centre can control over



**Daniel Knight:** 'Our goal at Fibaro is to bring AV into a much more intelligent home automation system'

200 devices and the interface guides you through the configuration process using a computer or the iOS/Android app.

**More intelligent automation**

Fibaro uses Z-wave technology, a protocol that allows devices from other manufacturers, such as IP cameras and thermostats, to communicate with the Home Centre controller. Knight assures us that Fibaro can control any device that works by TCP/IP, such as Smart TVs, so that the system is fully geared up to act as a universal remote.

He's also a tad scathing about the capabilities of existing home automation controllers: 'Our goal is to bring AV into a much more intelligent home automation system. Fibaro can automatically dim the lights and lower the blinds for the ideal TV watching experience, and it can respond to the doorbell by automatically pausing a movie and brightening the lights again.'

The app interface we saw looked rather functional but Knight reassured us that a new version of software (4.0) is on the way that will appear much slicker. It will also incorporate plug-ins, which users will be able to write and send and receive by email.

Fibaro sees itself being used by electricians, who will feel totally at ease with the technical requirements, but nonetheless expects lots of interest from the general public, who can buy the system directly from [Fibarouk.co.uk](http://Fibarouk.co.uk).

## Switch on with Asda



Supermarket giant Asda has just launched three new ranges of Polaroid

TVs, consisting of 15 new models. The Polaroid TV Series 1 range features eight screens from a 19in model with built-in DVD (£109) to a 55in Full HD model (£499). The Series 3 line-up adds Smart TV functionality including BBC iPlayer and Netflix, with five models sized between 22in (£139) and 50in (£429). Finally, Series 5 adds passive 3D to the mix (with eight pairs of 3D glasses) and comes in 42in (£369) and 50in (£499) screen sizes. [www.asda.com](http://www.asda.com)

## High-spec HDMI



The Chord Company has introduced a new high-speed HDMI cable designed to get the best out of your system's AV

capabilities. The Active Resolution HDMI V2 features a new high-performance chipset and heavier gauge silver-plated, oxygen-free 26 AWG conductors for all critical signal paths. The cable is also fitted with a die-cast gold-plated HDMI plug to improve shielding. The Active Resolution HDMI V2 cable is available in a variety of lengths between 0.75m and 20m, with prices starting at £150. [www.chord.co.uk](http://www.chord.co.uk)

## Titanic conditioning



Power conditioning specialist IsoTek has unleashed the 'radically revamped' successor to 2005's GII Titan, the

EVO3 Titan. Priced around £2,700, the new model is available in a choice of black or silver finishes and features a unique nine-stage Direct-Coupled conditioning network in a series parallel configuration. IsoTek claims that the new tech means that the EVO3 Titan offers a '600 per cent increase in common mode noise filtering and 20 per cent increase in differential mode filtering' over its predecessor. [www.isoteksystems.com](http://www.isoteksystems.com)



This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



## 1 Bringing Italian style to the UK

Looking for a uniquely stylish loudspeaker? Then look no further as The Multi-Room Company Ltd. has been appointed the exclusive UK distributor for Italian designer speaker brand Garvan. The

Faenza-based manufacturer makes a range of in-wall, on-wall, freestanding, marine and outdoor speakers aimed at 'the design-conscious installer and consumer', including the flagship Drop speaker (pictured) crafted by Faenza's 'world famous' porcelain artisans.

## 2 Money woes

Sony has cut its profit forecast from the 230 billion yen forecast made last May to just 26 billion yen. The company blames the huge drop on its exit from the PC market and the impact on its disc manufacturing business caused by the 'demand for physical media contracting faster than anticipated.'

## 3 70 per cent smarter

LG has confirmed that 70 per cent of its 2014 range of TVs will feature its new webOS Smart TV platform. LG acquired the webOS operating system from Hewlett Packard last year and the new TV version has been designed from the ground up for an improved user experience.

## 4 Paying by the inch

DreamWorks Animation CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg believes that in the future the amount we pay to watch a film will be determined by the size of the screen we watch it on, stating: 'A movie screen will be \$15. A 75in TV will be \$4. A smartphone will be \$1.99'. How exactly this lunacy would be policed when it comes to screencasting tech (like Miracast) is unclear...

## 5 Panasonic promotion

Panasonic is celebrating this year's Summer of sport with a new promotion on its TVs. Anybody who purchases one of the selected Panasonic Viera TVs between May 1 and July 16 this year is entitled to up to £300 cashback. For full terms and conditions visit <http://promotions.panasonic.co.uk/offer/viera-spring-cashback-offer>



Projector market shows growth

## 6 A night at the 4K opera

Samsung made history in May as it teamed up with the Vienna State Opera to stream Giuseppe Verdi's *Nabucco* opera live in 4K.

The screening was available to watch free of charge via the Samsung Smart TV app on any of the brand's 2014 range of UHD TVs that support the HEVC codec. The possibility of further live 4K transmissions from the State Opera has not yet been decided.

## 7 Carter needs correcting

Fans of the classic 1971 British crime flick *Get Carter* will no doubt be horrified to learn that the recent UK Blu-ray release used the film's US soundtrack, which redubbed some of the dialogue to make it easier for our Transatlantic cousins to understand. Drop the studio an email via [WBCustomerServices@technicolor.com](mailto:WBCustomerServices@technicolor.com) to let it know how you feel about this debacle.

## 8 Classification clarification

In response to our report in HCC #234 about the recent changes to the Video Recordings Act, the BBFC has asked us to make it clear that only documentary material 'that would be rated 12 or higher under BBFC guidelines' must be submitted for classification 'and not content that would be rated U or PG'. The BBFC goes on to say that 'to help distributors when the change comes into force, we will provide on our website examples of the type of work that should be submitted'.

## 9 Mainstream acceptance

Netflix has claimed on its blog that it 'will likely take up to five years before Ultra HD 4K becomes mainstream'. Does this mean we can't expect lots of new 4K content appearing on the streaming service this year?

## 10 PJ sales look pretty bright

The latest market research released by Futuresource Consulting shows that the worldwide video projection market grew an impressive six per cent year-on-year during the final three months of 2013, with Western Europe seeing an overall growth of three per cent. However, while France and Germany both saw solid growth, it was a rather different story in the UK, with the market here shrinking by five per cent during the same time frame.

## PREMIERE

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

### Whizzpopping news!

Steven Spielberg has reportedly signed on to direct a new live-action adaptation of Roald Dahl's beloved children's book *The BFG*, working from a script by E.T. screenwriter Melissa Mathison.

### Hobbit changes name



Peter Jackson took to Facebook recently to let fans know that he was changing the name of the final part of his *Hobbit* trilogy. What was once *The Hobbit: There and Back Again* will now be the rather more exciting *The Hobbit: Battle of the Five Armies* instead.

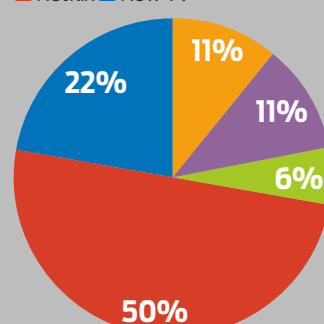
### Star Wars update

Following months of speculation, we finally know the cast for 2015's *Star Wars: Episode VII*. Returning actors Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, Mark Hamill, Anthony Daniels, Peter Mayhew and Kenny Baker will be joined by franchise newcomers John Boyega, Daisy Ridley, Adam Driver, Oscar Isaac, Andy Serkis, Domhnall Gleeson and Max von Sydow.

## WE ASKED...

Which is the best of the following Video on Demand services?

Amazon Prime Instant Video  
Apple iTunes  
Blinkbox  
Netflix  
Now TV



Results from [www.homecinemachoice.com](http://www.homecinemachoice.com)  
Go online for more polling action



# Everything is awesome...

The LEGO Movie → Warner Bros Home Entertainment → All-region BD/R2 DVD



...or at least it will be come July 21, when Warner Bros Home Entertainment unleashes *The LEGO Movie* onto DVD, Blu-ray and 3D Blu-ray in the UK.

A hit with critics and audiences alike when it played at cinemas earlier this year, *The LEGO Movie* is also shaping up to be one of 2014's biggest discs, and in

addition to the promise of top-tier AV performance, fans who pick up this comical action-packed animated smash on Blu-ray can look forward to a host of extras including a commentary, *Everything is Awesome* sing-along, test footage, deleted scenes, featurettes and more.





"AN ANARCHIST PUNK DREAM"  
- SLEAZENATION

"DELICIOUSLY SUBVERSIVE"

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- EMPIRE

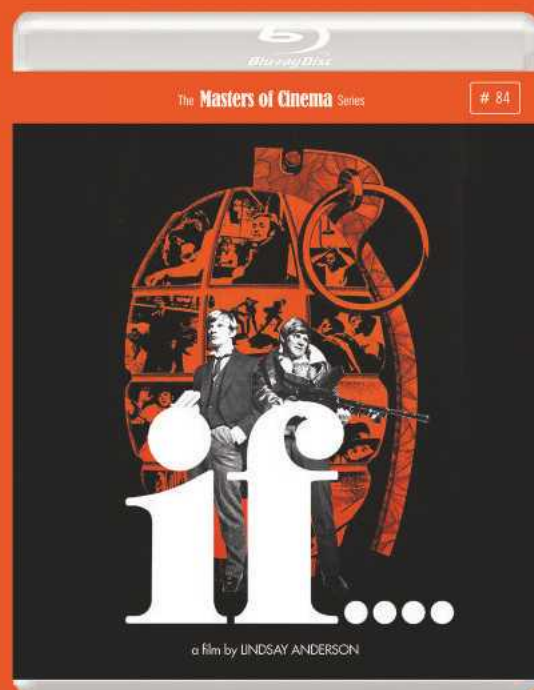
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# Blu-ray music, pure and simple





Universal Music Group wants to use the beloved hi-def movie format to bring high-quality audio to the masses. **Martin Pipe** explains the appeal of High Fidelity Pure Audio

**FIRST THERE WAS** the scratchy and hissy shellac 78, which was rendered obsolete by the improved sound of the 'microgroove' vinyl LP in the mid-1950s. Twenty years later, we had eight-track and cassette alternatives for pre-recorded music on the move – early in-car gear, followed by Sony's Walkman revolution. Recorded music was then taken into the digital realm by CD, but beyond that not a lot has happened to the technical basics of music for most mainstream users. Sure, downloaded music is now a popular option courtesy of iTunes and its ilk, but the vast majority listen at no better than CD quality. Indeed, if you haven't opted for a lossless download format like Apple Lossless or FLAC, and stuck with compression technologies like MP3 and AAC, then it's probably worse.

Audiophiles, on the other hand, have had a different experience. At the turn of the millennium, the SACD and DVD-Audio high-resolution disc formats were introduced, unimpeded by audible compression artifacts. At their best, they matched (or got close to) vinyl's sheer musicality while providing CD's longevity and convenience, and added discrete multichannel audio to boot. Back catalogues of material were released, with music fans able to enjoy 5.1 versions of such classics as Elton John's *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*, Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* or Don Fagen's *The Nightfly*. New material also made it onto the formats, too.

Yet for all their good intentions, SACD and DVD-A failed as mainstream choices. The problem was, as ever, a question of marketing and consumer confusion. Buyers didn't know which format to back, at a time when DVD-Video was becoming mainstream, and continued to buy CDs. Not even the formats' specific advantages – SACD's 'hybrid' CD layer for backwards-compatibility with older disc players, and the DVD-Video compatible content of some DVD-A discs – could save them.

But, as download sites catering for audiophile tastes continue to gain fans, is disc-based hi-res audio dead in the water? Not yet, apparently. And it's all thanks to Blu-ray.

#### An obvious solution

Blu-ray has similar hi-res audio capabilities to DVD-A, and it's surprising that more hasn't been made of this. From the outset the format supported audio with 24-bit resolution and 96kHz/192kHz sampling rates, and it offers a choice of uncompressed PCM, or the Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio lossless codecs. Audio-only Blu-ray discs were introduced fairly early, but were the province of specialist labels like 2L in Norway, whose releases tend to be specialist audiophile recordings of demonstration quality, among them Trondheim Solistene's excellent *Divertimenti* – a selection of chamber pieces from Britten, Bartok, Bjorkland and Bacewicz.

But what about more mainstream releases? They're usually the province of big record companies,

and we've had to wait much longer for one of these to embrace Blu-ray's musical potential. Step forward the Universal Music Group (UMG) and its High Fidelity Pure Audio drive.

UMG is an enormous umbrella of record labels covering many different musical genres. Among these are such household names as Capitol, Geffen, A&M, Motown, Decca, Virgin-EMI, Blue Note, Def Jam and Island. And it is plundering these for releases on High Fidelity Pure Audio discs – a brand-name for a marketing initiative and standardised form of Blu-ray audio.

When I met with Universal's head of global new business (and High Fidelity Pure Audio advocate) Olivier Robert-Murphy, he compared the evolution of video in the home – VHS to 3D Blu-ray – with

**'As hi-res download sites gain fans, are discs dead in the water for audiophiles? Not yet – and it's all thanks to BD'**

that of domestic audio. Although video has improved in performance terms and convenience since the late 1970s, audio has concentrated on 'portability' rather than sound quality. 'We started with vinyl, one of the best sounds you could get, and then we had cassettes – I'm sure you remember winding up slack tape with a pencil. This was followed by the Compact Disc (which enjoyed 25 years of great success), MiniDisc and finally MP3s.'

The widespread adoption of high-quality video in the home, reckons Robert-Murphy, presents an opportunity for high-quality music. '60% of the population will soon have access to Blu-ray,' he claims, a figure no doubt aided by cheap-as-chips players bundled with TVs and today's BD spinning consoles. The UMG bigwig also reckons that Blu-ray will 'take over from DVD in 2015' – a stark reminder to those of us who have been using Blu-ray for seven years that we're not the norm – and says that living-room hi-fi (as opposed to the multichannel home cinema hardware familiar to *HCC* readers) is a 'massively growing segment'. It's logical, then, to combine the two. Feed that Blu-ray player into your audio system and, with a High Fidelity Pure Audio disc, you're in for a musical experience that gets close to vinyl – but with none of the effects of wear associated with repeat listening.

#### GRRR! for lift-off

In December 2012, High Fidelity Pure Audio was given its worldwide launch in France. The first release was the 50-track Rolling Stones *GRRR!* compilation. Initially the discs were available in FNAC retail outlets, but they're now available in

## ROCKIN' IN HI-RES

Classic guitar albums on High-Fidelity Pure Audio

### Deep Purple: Made in Japan

This live concert recording from the British heavy metal band enjoys a 40th Anniversary release, featuring both the original mix (remastered) and a newer mix.

### Sex Pistols: Never Mind The Bollocks...



Universal Music has loaded this scene-stealing debut from the Brit punk icons with a plethora of live performances from gigs in Stockholm and, er, Penzance.

### The Rolling Stones: Exile on Main Street

This classic double album originally released in 1972 after four years of on/off recording sees the Stones at their most ramshackle, bluesy best.

### Queen: A Night at the Opera



Replace your scratched DVD-Audio copy with this Blu-ray release featuring the well-regarded 5.1 mix. Altogether now: 'Scaramouche! Scaramouche!'

### The Who: Tommy

The 1969 concept album is now available in a Super Deluxe Edition, featuring a 5.1 Pure Audio Blu-ray, plus double CD and a bonus CD of live performances.

most global music markets — including the UK, where a typical platter sells for £17.

Over three quarters of a million discs have since been sold worldwide, according to Robert-Murphy, and you can now choose from an expanding range of titles. Among them is a variety of back catalogue material, with new titles continually being unearthed; for example, jazz-lovers will appreciate that classic Blue Note albums like Cannonball Adderley's *Somethin' Else* will be available on High Fidelity Pure Audio soon. However, contemporary material is also being released on Pure Audio. 'George Michael's *Symphonica* was the first 'frontline' brand-new release that we have done on High Fidelity Pure Audio,' says product manager Josh Phillips. 'I wouldn't necessarily say it was done with High Fidelity Pure Audio in mind, but George's team were definitely keen to release a physical hi-res version of the album.'

High Fidelity Pure Audio discs (again copy-protected like SACD and DVD-A) use the entire capacity of the Blu-ray format to store high-resolution music — there is no video. You don't even need to switch on the TV — insert a two-channel-only disc, and it will start playing. Uncompressed PCM, Dolby TrueHD or DTS-HD Master Audio soundtracks are all supported, and the one you hear depends on the audio settings of your Blu-ray player.

Things are slightly different if the title also has a 5.1 soundtrack. On insertion, a menu invites you to choose between 5.1 and 2-channel. You can work blind by pressing the remote's Down key to select 5.1, and then 'enter' to start playing the album in glorious surround sound. High Fidelity Pure Audio discs have the same track running order of the CDs. Some, notably The Sex Pistols' *Never Mind The Bollocks*, are presented with additional material, such as bonus tracks, live recordings and B sides.

Most titles are 24-bit/96kHz, but a handful offer stereo 24-bit/192kHz soundtracks. Among the latter, are Beck's *Sea Change*, Lenny Kravitz's *Are You Gonna Go My Way?*, the Rolling Stones' *Let it Bleed* and Sam Cooke's *Portrait of a Legend*.

Currently, 5.1 releases outnumber two-channel ones by some margin, and a key multichannel disc is the aforementioned *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*. This classic album celebrates its 40th birthday later this

year, and UMG took over the preview room of London's Metropolis recording studios to give it an airing. Using the same 5.1 mix created in 2003 for the SACD release, it sounded sublime.

Also from 1973 (and with a 5.1 mix) is Genesis' *Selling England By The Pound*, and HCC was told that the entire Genesis back catalogue will be released in this format. And there's good news for fans of The

**'Universal is hopeful that it can follow The Who's forthcoming *Quadrophenia* with more exclusive 5.1 projects'**

Who, as a brand-new 5.1 mix of *Quadrophenia* has been completed. 'This is the first time a surround mix of this album has been made available,' says Phillips, 'and it has been exclusively created for High Fidelity Pure Audio. This was produced by Pete Townshend himself, and we're hopeful that we can work with more artists on 5.1 projects.'

So with an installed base of Blu-ray players and an attractive roster of music to choose from, is there a rosy outlook for High Fidelity Pure Audio? Or is it destined to become another audiophile-only format that will fade away? While you certainly can't fault the sound quality, the problem it may have is that technology has fundamentally changed how we consume music, and you can't go back in time. Tellingly, inside every High Fidelity Pure Audio case is a voucher giving the consumer the chance to download a watermarked 320kbps MP3 version of the tracks on the album.

In France, customers have an alternative — a lossless 24-bit/96kHz FLAC file. Handy, as hi-res music on the move is starting to become popular, thanks to players like Astell & Kern's AK240 and Sony's NWZ-ZX1. Might UK consumers benefit from something similar? Over to Phillips for the last word: 'I can't put a date on if or when we'll follow suit internationally, but we are committed to HD audio in its various guises!' ■



Oliver Robert-Murphy, UMG's head of global new business, believes households are ready for hi-res audio



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# Get ready for kick off!

Ensure your system is running at its best with these simple everyday tweaks – and maybe treat yourself to some hardware upgrades, too

**THERE'S NOTHING LIKE** a global sporting event spanning 33 days – all of it broadcast in HD – to focus your mind on your home cinema system, as it's at times like this that friends and family will start pestering you to base a World Cup party around your bigscreen. But what if it's been a while since

you checked your display settings or fine-tuned your audio? Simple: devote a couple of hours to get everything running smoothly. A system spring clean needn't be complicated, and we've focused on a few key areas where you can make a difference without calling in a professional.

## Speaker placement

### HEED DOLBY'S ADVICE

Are your speakers off-side before the match even begins? Multichannel speaker placement and balance is critical in getting that really immersive feeling from movies and sporting events alike. With the World Cup broadcast – on some platforms at least – with direct 5.1 sound mixes (and you can break out Dolby Pro-Logic for ITV's output), it's time to get your speakers fine-tuned for the action.

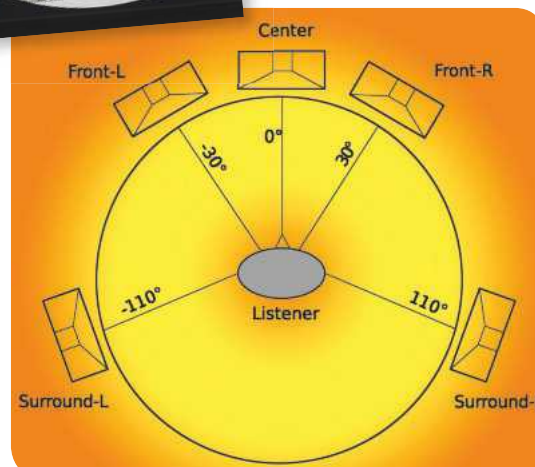
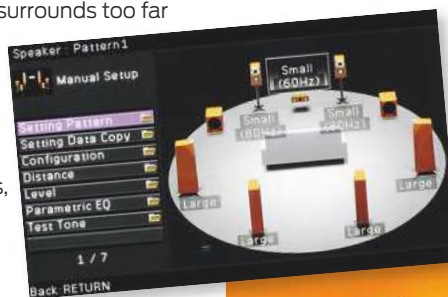
Dolby wrote the rule book on loudspeaker placement for 5.1 and 7.1 sound. As engineers and producers record multichannel mixes with the Dolby speaker map in mind, placing your speakers anywhere outside of Dolby specification is a real own goal. For example, placing your surrounds too far forward will limit rear effects, while setting them up too far back detaches the sound between the front and rear of the room. Doors, windows and furniture can get in the way of perfect placement, though, so consider turning your room lay-out around.

Check out [www.dolby.com](http://www.dolby.com)'s Home Theatre Speaker Guide and speaker maps for 5.1 and 7.1 sound, along with some useful advice. In a 5.1 setup the centre channel speaker should be dead ahead and just below the screen; main speakers between a 22° and 30° angle from the centre line, ensuring they are both at the same angle. Likewise, marry up surround speakers between 90° to 110°. Our preference is in the 100-110° range, just behind the seating position, to get the best rear effects.

With placement sorted and each speaker firmly mounted or levelled, it's time to sit back with the AVR remote control. Do a full run of the AVR setup, including multipoint measurements on and around the main listening position if available. It is vital to check the results, though, as odd room reflections can suggest half your speakers are in the next door neighbours' living room. Check distances with a tape measure, ensure small speakers are set to small and vice-versa, and listen to a manual test tone to check for even volume balance around the room. Try switching any EQ systems on and off, and remember the best sound is what you like best.

You may want to fine-tune it further but be aware that just because an advanced AVR will let you individually adjust the frequency response of all its channels, running amok with the parametric equaliser can become a frustrating task, so take your time.

Follow Dolby's map (below right) for speaker placement and then use your AVR's EQ system (right) to fine-tune





## TV calibration

## DO IT YOURSELF

Even a basic screen will make a difference to your enjoyment of any material, be it movies, games or sports. And while the ideal is to get a pro calibrator to perfect your telly's performance, there are tweaks you can undertake yourself.

Get yourself a test disc, such as Spears and Munsil's *HD Benchmark 2nd Edition*, *Digital Video Essentials* or a THX-certified movie release featuring the THX Optimizer and you can get your screen's brightness, sharpness, contrast and colour performance up to scratch. These offer patterns/screens designed to guide you through the calibration process using your TV's menu system, its handset and your own eyes. For instance, setting brightness becomes a case of nudging your screen's brightness control up/down until you're only able to see specific sections of a dedicated PLUGE pattern.

Not got a test disc? You can still make tweaks. First, get into the menus and switch any processing modes to 'off'. TV companies like to offer all manner of 'enhancers' and a general rule to follow is that none of them do anything of the sort. Watch out for any overscanning mode in particular – this trims the edges of a 1,920 x 1,080 picture, ostensibly to ensure that any edge-of-image noise on a TV broadcast is removed, but it means your screen is having to manipulate the remaining pixels to fit its Full HD count, resulting in a less than pixel-matched picture. Next, tackle sharpness (the exact setting may be called Edge Enhancement or something similar) which can easily add artefacts (such as a perceptible white fringing to edges) if it's set too high. Pause a Full HD movie on an image with a clear, bright edge – perhaps the end credits – and step up from the



Using a test disc like Spears & Munsil's *HD Benchmark* (left) is a great way to get to grips with your flatscreen's picture settings

Dedicated test screens, such as this contrast optimiser, enable you to see the effects of your adjustments



lowest sharpness setting to the point where a 'halo' begins to appear along it. Then reduce the sharpness setting until it disappears.

Tweaking contrast and brightness without test patterns is about using your eye and common sense. Work with your screen's settings and look out for 'crushed' dark areas and bleached out whites. At the very least, select the 'Cinema' or 'Natural' preset.

## Motion settings

## NOW'S THE TIME TO EXPERIMENT

Your flatscreen or projector no doubt offers a level of motion processing, and you've probably switched this off, preferring to stick with a movie or TV programme's natural frame-rate. Football, however, offers a good opportunity to fiddle with those smoothing modes as they can help to reduce some of the smearing/ghosting that can occur when, say, Cristiano Ronaldo hammers the ball toward goal at 70mph, and keep the pitch detailed as the camera pans around. Remember, of course, that all systems, be it Panasonic's IFC or Sony's Motionflow, are introducing artificial images, and the TV's processor can't be relied upon to get everything perfect. Poorly implemented systems can introduce distracting artefacts, often occurring around the edges of objects moving in front of detailed backgrounds.

Find your TV or projector's motion smoothing mode in the setup menu – it may be in the

'Advanced' section. Typically, it will offer a choice of levels (including 'Off', hopefully...). Experiment with all of them while viewing a football match. If you find the 'soap opera effect' too much for your sensibilities, switch it off and forget all about it, but you may discover you enjoy the silkier movement of the England back four.



Look for the motion smoothing mode on your flatscreen – in the case of this Panasonic plasma, it's tucked away in the Advanced Settings menu

## Wanna go large?

## BRING ON THE PROJECTOR!

**NOTHING RECREATES THE** buzz of a big sporting event better than a large projected image. Yet many are put off buying PJs by a misplaced belief that they're difficult to set up. The reality is that you can get most modern models delivering quality thrills in a couple of minutes. So if you're upgrading to a PJ, or want to double-check your current setup, read on.

First, where to put it? If room layout and PJ allow, place it in a raised position behind your viewing position (on a shelf or ceiling-mounted), as this means you'll just see the pictures, and not the machine making them. Some more affordable ones won't support this due to their short-throw lenses and limited zoom, so if you're positioning a projector in front of you, keep it as far from seating positions as possible to avoid heat/noise irritation.

Getting the image in the right place on your wall or screen can seem confusing, but it's actually pretty easy. If your PJ has optical shift wheels for moving its picture up and down or left and right, always use these to get images in the right place rather than using the digital keystone correction options. These distort the incoming image, effectively compromising its pixel for pixel clarity. If your PJ has no image shift, though, you'll almost certainly have to use keystone correction to stop the picture adopting a trapezoidal shape. Again, this is straightforward – shifting keystone up or down simply widens the top or bottom end of the image until all sides are perfectly perpendicular.

When it comes to picture quality, all PJs provide presets calibrated by the manufacturer to deliver optimum results with different types of source



Arriving at an accurate projected image isn't complicated – just familiarise yourself with zoom, focus and image shift controls

material. If your model has a 'sports' preset, give it a whirl; it's probably offering pushed brightness and colour, but this may suit your needs with gaudy sporting action. If your model provides standard/high and low/eco lamp settings, we'd suggest you use the high setting for well-lit rooms. Switch it back to low for watching movies in low light.

Lastly, get the image focused. This is so important to the clarity of your viewing experience that it's worth really dwelling on. Adjust focus with the w menus up, as these will feature small text that's helpful in getting the image as sharp as possible.

## Bass rules, so...

## LOVE YOUR SUBWOOFER

Admittedly, there's not likely to be huge amounts of low-end thump when England take on Italy, but with your speakers in order you shouldn't ignore your woofer – especially if it's been sitting in the most aesthetically pleasing corner of the room since it was first unwrapped. Time to show your sub some love.

First off, move it into the perfect position. Corner placement can boost bass output but the sound often gets flabby, so try back-wall or side-wall placement. Play some big bass tunes and walk around the room. If you are getting big peaks and dips in bass volume where those pesky low-frequency waves add-up or cancel each other out, keep moving the sub until the sound is more even across the room. The best spot is almost certainly going to be the least convenient, so you might need to compromise here.

Get it planted to the spot. You need a firm foundation to bag big bass, so adjust the feet to ensure there is no wobble in the cabinet when you



Your sub's back plate should offer phase, gain and cut-off controls

give it a firm push. On carpeted floors, spikes are invaluable as they pierce the carpet without damaging it and sink into the floorboards, giving a really solid base for, well, solid bass.

Now listen to your chosen material from your normal listening position and get an assistant to alter the sub's phase switch/control knob. When the bass seems its loudest, the output from your sub and main speakers are in phase. Perfect. Set the sub's cut-off frequency to maximum (your AVR is best at handling this), set gain to the midway point and set any special filters to stun – more often labelled 'impact' or 'slam'.

Shoot for really lung-crushing LF across sporting events by setting the main speakers to LARGE and bass management set to LFE+MAIN in your AVR menu. Note that running the AVR's setup system will likely override your bass management settings. Now it's time to listen. The bass should be tightly focused with real impact. Not enough bass? Nudge up the sub gain. Too much bass? Consider watching snooker instead.





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## TIME FOR A CLEAN UP

After the very best performance? Pay attention to connections...

If you're keen to go the extra mile then you can borrow some traditions from the hi-fi community. Audiophiles chasing the nth degree in sound quality frequently give their speaker terminals a clean to counter corrosion found on metal-on-metal connectors.

The sonic gurus on our sister mag *Hi-Fi Choice* suggest that simply unplugging and replugging connectors will help to shift thin layers of surface corrosion, but also recommend using a chemical cleaner on your silver/gold-plated terminals – as abrasive cleaners will remove the plating. Will you notice a difference in audio quality? Maybe not, but everything will definitely look clean and shiny...

**Sshhhhhhhh!**

## PREPARE FOR LATE-NIGHT LISTENING

As it takes place in Brazil, this year's World Cup throws up some matches at unsociable hours, including Group Stage fixtures at 2am UK time. Yet if you're staying up to watch, it doesn't mean that everyone else in the household wants to, so turn to your AVR for help keeping domestic bliss.

If your amp has Audyssey Dynamic Volume, Dolby Volume, or a brand-specific offering, such as Yamaha's Adaptive DRC (Dynamic Range Control), it's time to use it. These digital processing modes work to narrow the dynamic range of your AVR's sound so that during low-level listening quiet sounds aren't completely unintelligible, and that sudden screams of 'gooooooooaaaaa!' won't disturb those upstairs. They're equally handy for watching movies in the middle of the night, too, but remember to deactivate them when the end credits roll.

Alternatively, break out some headphones. There are hundreds of models to choose from – the most important consideration is that they offer a cable long enough to reach from your amp to your sofa. For authentic surround sound, our current favourite option is Sony's MDR-HW700DS. These £450 cans incorporate a wireless surround processor (which also doubles as an HDMI switcher), enabling a very convincing multichannel soundstage, up to 'virtual' 9.1.

**Surround sound headphones will keep you immersed in the action**

**Your AVR may offer dynamic volume control**



**Be illuminated**

## TAKE CHARGE OF LIGHTING



Bias lighting helps reduce eyestrain, and LED strips are good for a DIY application

This Summer's football bonanza provides a test for your viewing room, as you'll be in there during both day and night. Being in control of ambient light will improve your AV experience and help reduce fatigue and eye-strain.

Watching in total darkness isn't a good option – your peepers will start to suffer. Likewise, a barrage of bright lights in your room will create unwanted reflections. Consider bias lighting instead, in the form of a backlight mounted behind your TV, emitting illumination duller than the screen itself, but bright enough to subjectively improve contrast performance. A Philips Ambilight TV is a good example of bias lighting at work, but at its most basic it could just be a lamp snuggled behind your telly. For a sleek DIY effect, consider an LED strip light (these are very useful for wall-mounted screens, too) and for real flair, try Philips' Hue system, which includes LED strips, lamps and bulbs all controlled via Wi-Fi with customised colour options.

During the day, don't counter the effects of streaming sunshine by turning straight to your flatscreen's dynamic mode. Certainly, tweaks to the brightness will compensate for ambient light but first pay attention to where your TV is sited in relation to outside light, and reflections. If necessary, consider moving it. Or, if you have to, shut the curtains, or get some blackout blinds, and promise to open them again after the final whistle...



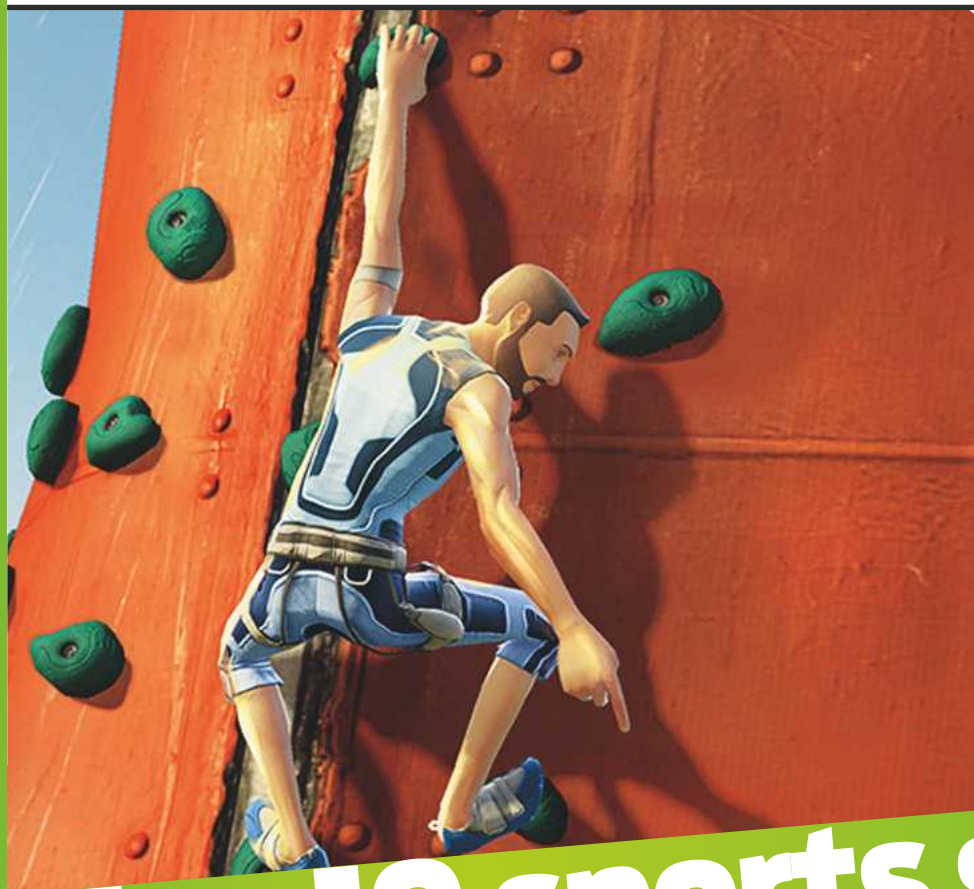
# "BARNSTORMER"

## SVS SB-2000 Active Sub

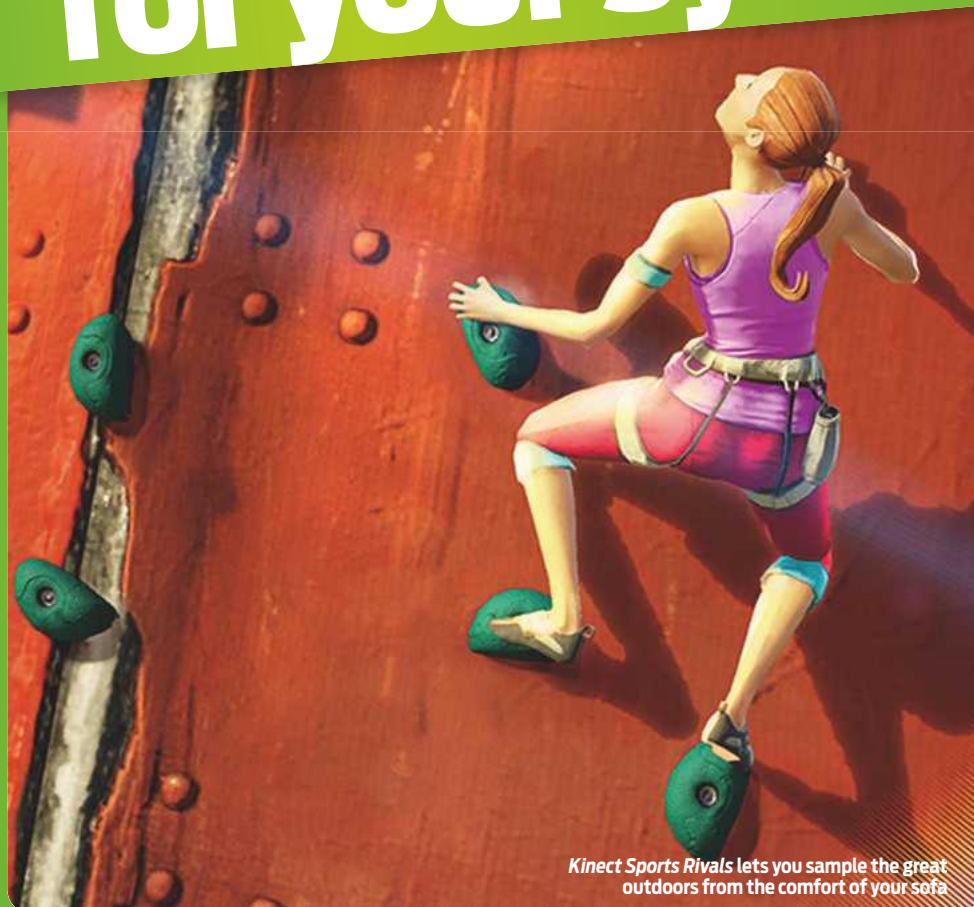


“ installation is simple...authentic weight and punch...rich and inviting...omnipotent low-end thud...seriously impressive... cinematic scale and presence...for the asking price, SVS's SB-2000 provides hair-raising levels of low-frequency fun. ”

Mark Craven, Home Cinema Choice, April 2014



# Top 10 sports games for your system



*Kinect Sports Rivals lets you sample the great outdoors from the comfort of your sofa*

**Rik Henderson** looks at ways to extend the World Cup experience on the PS4, Xbox One and more

**SPORTS GAMES HAVE** come a long way since the likes of *Pong*. Photo-realistic hi-def graphics, multichannel audio, official licences and motion control are just some of the highlights offered by the current crop of titles, and with a Summer of sport just around the corner, they're a perfect way to keep your buzz going when there's a break in the action. But which to buy? Well, we've sifted through the potential challengers to pick a team of 10 videogames, both current and next-generation, that no sporting addict should be without. From football and F1 to baseball and UFC, it's time to pick your colours and hit 'Start'...

## 2014 FIFA WORLD CUP BRAZIL

### Xbox 360, PS3

Electronic Arts has consistently provided the official games of both the World Cup and European Championships, but last time out it did so as downloadable content for the previously-released *FIFA* title at the time. *Euro 2012* was an update pack for *FIFA 12* and carried a cut-down price. Not so the official game of this year's World Cup in Brazil. Perhaps because it's more of a global event, EA has decided to release a standalone title for current-generation consoles (not PS4 and Xbox One, unfortunately) and has crammed in plenty to justify its £40 price tag.

For a start, it is a gorgeous-looking game, invoking the spirit of the tournament in both graphical flair, theme and colour schemes. When in play, everything has a slight orange tint to give the illusion that it is being played in the heat of Brazil, and it's effective.

At its essence though, it is a slightly souped-up version of *FIFA 14* and those with the original (see opposite) will have a choice to make on whether they want this World Cup edition mainly for the atmosphere.





2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil

Play soccer samba-style with the official World Cup Brazil game



Kinect Sport Rivals

FIFA 14



## FIFA 14

### Xbox One, PS4, Xbox 360, PS3

*FIFA 14* is quite simply the best football game ever created, especially on the next-generation consoles: PS4 and Xbox One.

Graphically it is a *tour de force*, running at 60 frames-per-second and as sharp and smooth as a milk chocolate-covered apple. Electronic Arts' in-house development team made great use of the extra processing power of the two new machines to add an extraordinary level of depth to the off-field visuals, with each member of the crowd rendered and animated.

On the pitch, the players have more planes of movement than on any other version offered before, allowing them to rotate and move in 360-degree arcs. Previous titles and the current-generation versions are great and responsive, but the players on those are still limited to set angles of movement, even though there are many.

The sound, too, is just simply incredible, especially through a decent 5.1 setup. You really will think you are in the middle of a match, albeit losing 7-0 to Honduras.

PES 2014



## PES 2014

### Xbox 360, PS3

For several of the last few years, *Pro Evolution Soccer* – once the go-to game for footy fans with more of a penchant for arcade action – has been underwhelming. As main rival *FIFA* was getting better and better with each generation, *PES* was standing still or even going backwards.

*PES 2014* is, therefore, a very welcome return to form. While no *FIFA* beater, it brings back some of the memories of madcap *Pro Evolution Soccer* tournaments in its heyday.

Graphically, it's not as accomplished as the competition, with licensed and sponsored teams still being conspicuous by their absence, but the gameplay itself is fun and frantic – less tactical than *FIFA* perhaps, but easy to dip in and out of. We can't wait to see what Konami might pull from its sleeve when it comes to the PS4 and Xbox One, but if you have a PS3 or Xbox 360 and just want to have fast and frenetic footy foolery, you really can't do much better.



## KINECT SPORT RIVALS

### Xbox One

The far more advanced Kinect that comes as standard with the Xbox One brings more refined technologies for games to exploit. *Kinect Sports Rivals* is perhaps the flagbearer for the motion tracking device so far, with some gameplay elements that would not have been possible on the previous generation. For a start, you are scanned in order to put an avatar in the game that looks like you, albeit a cartoony and beefed-up version.

Then there are the games themselves. Six of them are available to be played in mini-game fashion, although all are well realised and require different levels of interaction and skills. Tennis, target shooting, soccer (football to you and I) and bowling are staples for this kind of multi-sport motion game. Rock climbing and wake racing, however, are not – although the latter is actually the most fun as it's essentially based on the Nintendo classic *Wave Race 64*, except with leaning and general real-body action antics.

It looks astonishing and there are plenty of leaderboards and multiplayer aspects to keep even a solo player entertained. An essential purchase for athletic Xbox One owners.



## Top Spin 4



## TOP SPIN 4

**Xbox 360, PS3, Wii**

*Top Spin 4* has been around for the current-generation consoles for a while – three years now, in fact – but is still the best tennis game by far. You can also pick it up fairly cheap from online retailers or in second-hand bins in games shops.

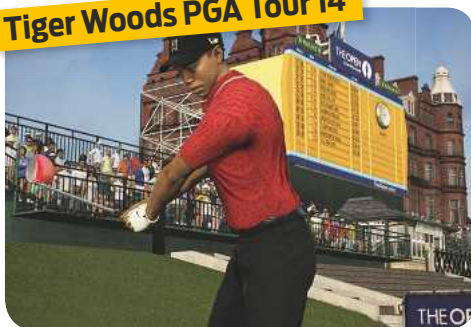
Plenty of licensed real-world players are available in the game, from both sexes, and you can either play as them or against in a well-thought-out and in-depth career mode. This latter feature is the most fun as you get to style and create your own tennis player and attempt to take them to the top of the world rankings by winning events around the globe.

There is a role-playing element too, with points being awarded for good play for you to spend on improving your statistics. But, for us, perhaps the best thing about *Top Spin 4*, which sets it above rivals like *Virtua Tennis*, is the graphical ambience. The stadiums look grand and realistic and the high-definition visuals pop with detail. This brilliantly addictive and fast-paced game is definitely best experienced on as big a TV or projection screen as possible.



*F1 2013* marries sumptuous visuals with electrifying audio

## Tiger Woods PGA Tour 14



## TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 14

**Xbox 360, PS3**

EA might be dropping the Tiger Woods branding for its next *PGA Tour* game, but the great golfer (not so great a driver) has gone out on a high. The long-running series has never looked better and with all of the four major championships available to play, it's about as good as it gets for indoor golf aficionados for now. There's a nice learning curve to the career mode, with plenty of hours on the greens and fairways required to build up your attributes. The control system isn't fiddly, but still takes mastering.

We're also particular fans of the extra mode on this addition to the franchise. As well as accurately emulating modern tournament golf, you can play classic golfing legends of the past, going as far as wearing the clothes and using the ancient wooden clubs.

Naturally, it's not the most adrenaline-fuelled experience. But we've often sparked this up on a Full HD TV and wistfully whiled away hours while bird song and the occasional clapping spectator reverberated around the surround system. Gaming rarely gets calmer.

## F1 2013



## F1 2013

**Xbox 360, PS3, PC**

Formula One games have become a bit like *FIFA* titles since Codemasters took the reins of the licence. Each year, incremental changes – and new drivers and car liveries – add something new for fans. But what we like most about the latest, *F1 2013*, is that it's not as mind-numbingly difficult and frustrating as some of those that have come before it.

Admittedly, it doesn't feature the new rule changes and weird nose cones of the 2014 real-life season, but you do get to drive some of the cars of the '80s and '90s if you manage to track down one of the limited Classic Edition versions of the title.

Graphically it looks superb, and when played from the view behind the wheel (you might even want to invest in a steering wheel and pedal accessory for your console or PC) it's as close to hurtling around a track at 215mph as you're ever likely to get. But we do advise perhaps turning down your speaker system somewhat, especially the rear channels, as the roar of the engines can get pretty fierce at times. Or you may like it that way...



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Home Cinema Choice, May 2014

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Spitfire 24-12 SL



NBA 2K14



UFC



MLB 14: The Show

## UFC

### Xbox One, PS4

First teased along with the next-generation versions of *FIFA 14*, *Madden NFL 25* and *NBA Live 14*, *UFC* looks incredible. Easily Electronic Arts' most impressive sports game, graphically, to date, there's a visual realism here that is simply mind-boggling. The game features the fighters of the real UFC and each looks scarily lifelike, down to the moody tattoos and thuggish haircuts. This seems, to us, like the real beginning of next-gen gaming. At least in looks.

And whether you are a fan of mixed martial arts, fighting games or both, there is plenty in here to get your heart pumping. Gameplay owes much to EA's boxing franchise *Fight Night*, although there are far more moves that can be performed, all served up with wince-inducing spatters of blood on the floor of the 'octagon'. Multiplayer mode, meanwhile, is a great way to settle family arguments.

The career mode is no pushover, either. While it may seem easy to knockout a slow-witted opponent with a spinning back-kick, at some point you'll have to master the floor-based grappling moves...

## MLB 14: THE SHOW

### PS4, PS3, PS Vita

American pro baseball, with its essentially turn-based gameplay and tense atmosphere, is a great subject for a videogame, and there are none better at representing the aura of America's national pastime than *MLB 14 The Show*.

Although the PS3 and PS Vita versions of the game are first-rate – especially the latter if you travel a lot and like a game you can dip in and out of at your leisure – the PS4 iteration is quite simply stunning. Not only do the real characters from MLB look incredible thanks to the extra processing power, the ballparks, ambience and crowd reactions are spine-tingling. Hit a home run and you know it.

Sony claims that the Road to the Show mode is the most played across the series history, and it is genuinely one of the most addictive sub-games we've experienced. You take a rookie pitcher or fielder through the first draft to, hopefully, a World Series win in as many seasons as it takes to climb the ranks, but thanks to the PS4's graphical prowess you can make your in-game avatar look as realistic as the pre-rendered players. It's rare that a game allows you this kind of depth.

## OR SPIN UP A FOOTBALL FLICK

Gamed out? Then watch one of these

### Escape to Victory

Stallone, Pele, Bobby Moore, Michael Caine and the Ipswich squad of 1980 tackle the Nazis in a wartime 'friendly' match. Weird but wonderful.

### Goal

The first of the trilogy of films tracking the fictitious career of a Mexican teenage footballer is well-made and interesting, even though it is directed by Danny Cannon. The sequels, however, are not.

### Shaolin Soccer

Stephen Chow's madcap movie mixes some delightful *Naked Gun* style sight gags, ludicrous kung fu action and an underdog sports story to delicious comic effect.

### The Damned United

Possibly our favourite footy film, *The Damned United* tracks Brian Clough (played by Michael Sheen) when he briefly took control of Leeds United in 1974. Funny and heartwarming, even though the Clough family disowned it.

### Soccer Dog: The Movie

Actually, we take that back. This is our favourite film about football by far. It's about a dog that can play soccer. 'Nuff said.

## NBA 2K14

### Xbox One, PS4, Xbox 360, PS3

To be any good at basketball you need to be of a relatively slim build and nearing seven feet tall, so videogame versions will always appeal to the tubby, stubby majority. And 2K Sports' *NBA 2K14* is one of the best out there, especially on the Xbox One and PS4, which put their supercharged graphics engines to good use.

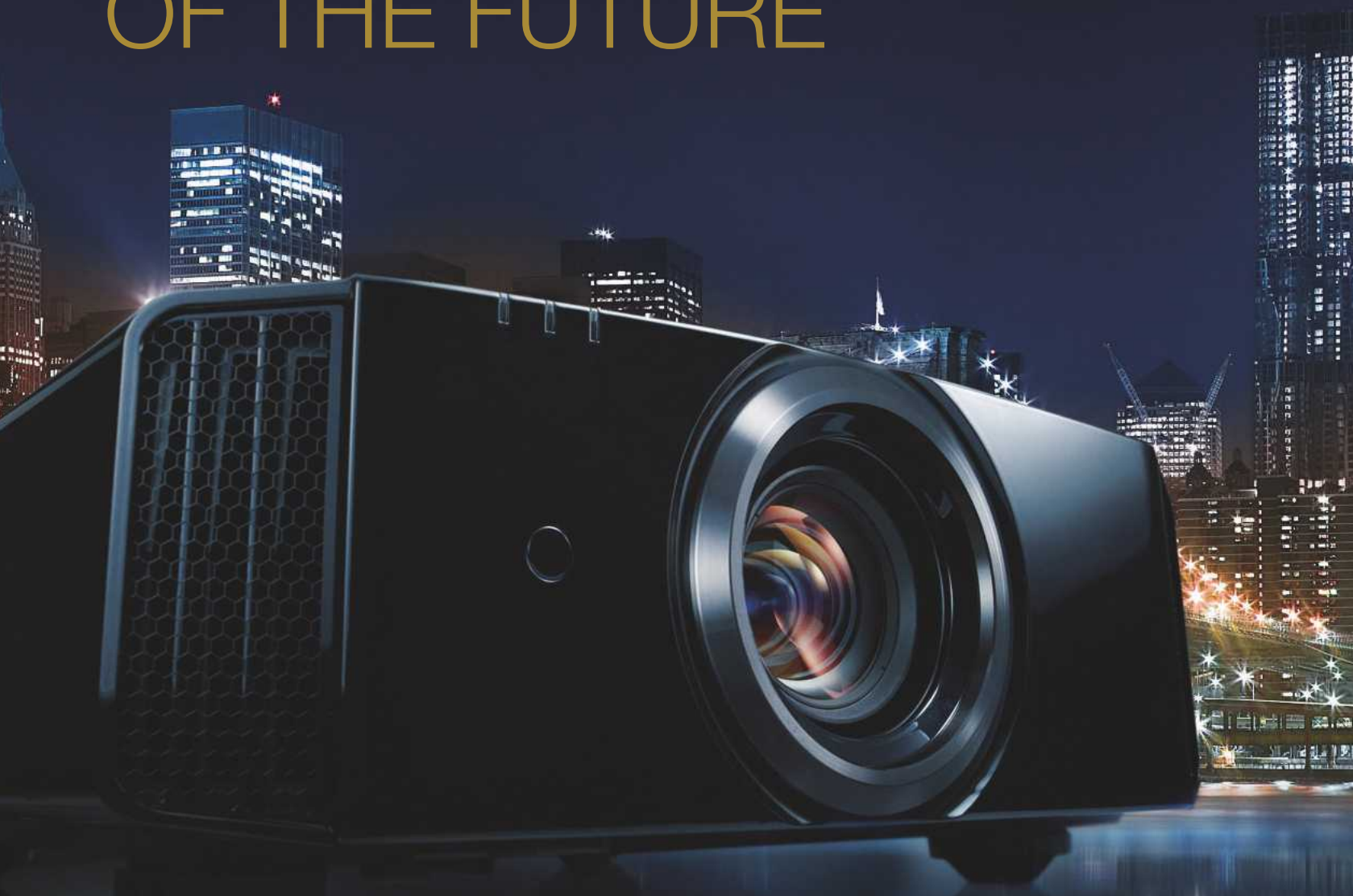
Stunning to look at, we're also extremely impressed by the sound of the game. Sneakers squeaking on polished floors as the players twist and turn, the crowd crowing, and the rushing commentary genuinely sounds like organic basketball coverage on the TV.

On next-generation consoles, the lanky players appear oh-so-lifelike, with their reflections in the court helping introduce realism and depth into a game that plays as good as it looks. Just be prepared to spend time in the training camp to master the ball-juggling skills available – this is a game with a lot more to it than you might at first think ■



# JVC

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\*\* Contrast ratio specifications are for the DLA-X900R.





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# C'est magnifique!

**Mark Craven** reports on a modern-day cinema room snuck into an 18th-century French chateau, where the emphasis is on elegance and high-end AV







#### ROOM CHECKLIST

**SCREEN RESEARCH:** 3.5m fixed-frame high gain Supreme Series projector screen

**JVC:** DLA-X75 projector

**OPPO:** BDP-103EU Blu-ray player

**SONY:** PlayStation 3

**APPLE:** Apple TV

**LINN:** 2 x Akurate 242 floorstanders; 4 x Majik 109 bookshelf speakers (rear and surrounds); Akurate 225 centre speaker; 2 x Akurate 226 subwoofers; 4 x Akurate 4200 power amplifiers; 4 x Majik 4100 power amplifiers

**ANTHEM:** AVM 50v surround sound processor

**CONTROL 4:** Control system incorporating touchscreen/handheld remotes; HC250 processor

**LUTRON:** Grafik Eye QS

**AV INSTALL SPECIALIST** Finite Solutions has offices in London, Cheshire and Leeds, but its work isn't limited to just the UK. This dedicated cinema room occupies what was formerly the billiards room of a chateau in rural France. *C'est la vie.*

The owner, a huge music and movie fan, already owned a high-end stereo music system from British brand Linn (plus a large collection of films and albums) and approached Finite Solutions demanding a cinema room with the same emphasis on quality. In short, he wanted a room where the image and sound performance had to be truly remarkable. And, judging from the kit installed, money wasn't much of a concern...

#### Akurate audio performance

Once 3D modelling had been completed and a final design agreed upon, Finite Solutions set about bringing in the hardware. The room sports a 7.2 speaker array, all drawn from the Linn product stable. The company's high-end Akurate speakers and power amplifiers are used for the front left, front right, centre channel and dual subwoofers. For the rear and surround channels, Linn Majik speakers and amplifiers are employed.

The floorstanding Akurate 242s, on front left/right duty, are deliciously over-engineered. Designed to be equally at home with hi-res music as movie soundtracks, they marry dual 6.5in bass drivers with the company's proprietary 3K Driver Array, a trio of high-frequency drivers mounted tightly to provide point-source dispersion. You can get these £7,500-per-pair speakers in any of 200 finishes. Here, they've opted for traditional wood.

Unlike most other professional makeovers, none of the speakers are housed in-wall or camouflaged in custom cabinetry. They're all on show. This is a consequence of the property itself – Finite Solutions had to ensure the installation was sympathetic to the original décor of the 18th century building, and the owner's personal taste.

Tying the audio system altogether is an Anthem AVM 50v processor. This heavyweight slab offers the brand's ARC room EQ system, hi-res audio decoding and twin bespoke DSPs. Feeding this is an Oppo universal Blu-ray layer, plus an Apple TV set-top box, Canal+ satellite receiver and a PlayStation 3.

The projector is JVC's DLA-X75, a £7,000 model with the second generation of the brand's e-shift uprezzing technology and a barnstorming performer. And its visuals are given real space to impress – the room is dominated by a gigantic projector screen, chosen once room size and throw calculations had been taking into account, from Screen Research. A high gain fixed-frame model from its Supreme Series, it measures 3.5m wide.



Not the typical seating array, but there's room for 12 across the three tiers

The cinema features discreet sound treatments to get the best from its high-end audio setup. All of the walls are covered with absorption material, to deaden it acoustically, and these are finished in a dark blue fabric to build upon the room's unique styling. In fact, the owner insisted on having little in the room to detract from the image on the screen. At the business end of the cinema, there are no pictures, images or lighting, and the installation team worked to eradicate any reflections from a window or picture. 'There's not a single ray of light,' explains Finite Solutions' Design Director Phil Cotton. 'So many cinemas are a bit bling – a bit *MTV Cribs* – whereas this is understated and elegant.'

'Nothing is just for show. It is streamlined and expressly lacking in superfluous room jewellery. The choice to decorate the room very simply with no frills – just comfortable furniture – was a deliberate one.'

### Taking control

'No frills' isn't a philosophy that extends to system control. Individual hardware handsets were put in a kitchen drawer and a Control 4 system was implemented to both provide ease-of-use (vital as guests would often be using the cinema room) and joined-up hardware functionality.

Two controllers are used, a 7in touchscreen model and Control 4's SR250 remote control. Apparently the owner prefers the former while his wife likes the more traditional handheld option. Selecting content from any source and firing up the PJ becomes straightforward.



The lighting array is also controllable using the Control 4 remote controls, as well as a Lutron Grafik Eye QS. Everything except the 'All Off' preset, actually. With its tiered seating array and slender stairway up the side of the room, the decision was made to keep the step-lighting on at a low level whenever the cinema space is in use, to avoid anyone tripping over in the dark during the interval. 'These lights can only be turned off at the doorway as the cinema is being shut down,' explains the installer.

The seating – a mixture of luxurious-looking period style pieces – provides room across three levels for around a dozen movie fans, and there are additional chairs on hand should even more guests show up. Aesthetically, admits Finite Solutions, it is rather 'eccentric',

### JVC's DLA-X75: the cinema's bigscreen behemoth

but is exactly what the owner wanted. 'He loves it!'

And the resulting audio-visual experience is, we're told, rather special. 'This system can effortlessly handle anything you play on it, from action movies to delicate classical music,' explains Cotton. As for the owner, he simply says it's 'amazing!', particularly the epic effect of that truly large screen with hi-def material.

And it might not be the end of Finite Solutions' work across the Channel. With this picture palace going down such a storm, the owner is now considering a similar project for his holiday home on the Cote D'Azur. Naturally, Team HCC is open to invitations... ■



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[tannoy.com](http://tannoy.com)



October 2013 - Precision 6.2



Precision 6.2



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Precision 6.2 / 6.1 / 6C /  
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Precision 6.2 / 6.1 / 6C /  
TS2.12 system



# REVIEWS

→ **HARDWARE HIGHLIGHTS** MONITOR AUDIO Silver series 5.1 array with bipole/dipole surrounds **SAMSUNG** 46in H7000 LED Smart TV & premium all-in-one system **LG** Soundbase with BD playback **SONY** Entry-level SXRD cinema projector & 40in Full HD TV **DUNE HD** Enthusiast-grade media player with 3D support **YAMAHA** Bluetooth-toting soundbar **ROKU** HDMI streamer **AND MORE!**

## On the money!

JBL's Studio 2 range provides a floorstanding 5.1 array for just over £1,000. See p54 for our verdict

### HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

**Danny Phillips** discovers that there's nothing second-rate about Monitor Audio's Silver series speakers

# Musically minded

**MONITOR AUDIO IS** a revered name in audio circles but if you're yet to sample its wares then this newly-buffed Silver series is a superb starting point. Sandwiched between the Gold and Bronze ranges, it marks the point where you start getting a proper high-end performance without having to remortgage.

Using the acclaimed Silver RX series as its blueprint, this mid-market range includes eight new designs combining new innovations and features from the Platinum and Gold series that have been updated and refined.

The range includes three floorstanders – Silver 6, 8 and 10 (£1,000, £1,250 and £1,500 per pair respectively); two standmounts, Silver 1 and 2 (£500 and £650); the Silver Centre (£375); Silver FX surrounds (£500) and the Silver W12 subwoofer (£1,000).

Just as it did with the RX series, Monitor Audio has bundled these new Silver speakers into a sub-£3K supergroup (6AV12). The line-up includes a pair of Silver 6 floorstanders as the front men, Silver Centre on vocals, Silver FX as backing singers and the W12 sub on bass. All the speakers use the same drivers to ensure tonal consistency, a vital part of the listening experience.

They come in a choice of Rosenut, Walnut, Natural Oak and Black Oak real wood veneers, and premium High Gloss Black and White finishes (as used here), which take the overall price to £3,160.

Chiselled, robust and gleaming white, the Silver 6 floorstander is a sonic Adonis. This handsome, beautifully-made speaker's elegance and heft make it worth every penny of the asking price, and at 885mm tall it's not too imposing either.

In the box is a thick plinth that screws onto the bottom and finishes off the look nicely, but you don't have to use it. There are substantial

polymer pad feet for hard floors with detachable spikes for carpets. On the back are two sets of bi-wireable binding posts.

Monitor Audio's C-CAM (ceramic-coated aluminium/magnesium alloy) cones lurk behind the grilles – one 6in bass, one 6in mid/bass. But unlike the previous Silver RX, which featured a centre aperture for the voice coil, these take the form of a continuous dish with nothing in the middle – the voice coil is found behind and coupled to a more efficient drive assembly. Monitor Audio claims this makes the cone stronger and gives it a greater radiating area than the previous design.

For the rear channels, Monitor Audio signals its home cinema intentions with a pair of bipole/dipole speakers, each with a forward-facing 6in driver and twin side-mounted tweeters. A switch on the back lets you choose between the two modes. You can, therefore, change the performance to suit your setup. Bipole – which keeps the mid/bass driver and tweeters all in phase – is better suited to a 5.1 arrangement where the speakers are placed behind the listening position, creating a wide soundstage while retaining a sense of directionality. In dipole mode the mid/bass driver and one tweeter are out of phase with the other tweeter – one pushes, the other pulls – creating a more wraparound rear image. If you're using two pairs of FX in a 7.1 setup, this is the mode to use.

The W12 subwoofer, like the centre channel, is somewhat on the large side, but is attractive. >





# AV INFO

## PRODUCT:

Mid-range 5.1  
floorstanding  
speaker array

## POSITION:

Below the Gold and  
above the Bronze  
series, natch

## PEERS:

Quadral Signo  
Avantgarde 5.1;  
Tannoy Precision 5.1;  
KEF R100 5.1





A welcome feature of the W12 subwoofer is the top-mounted control panel

The spec includes a 500W DSP-controlled amplifier and a 12in front-firing long-throw driver, plus three EQ modes – Movie, Music and Impact. Helpfully the volume and EQ controls are placed on top so you don't have to keep climbing over it to access the back panel.

But the *pièce de résistance* is the built-in Automatic Position Correction (APC), which optimises bass performance for its position in the room by tweaking the frequency response. Rather rare on a woofer, it's easy to use – just plug in the supplied mic, hit a couple of buttons and the test tones begin. After running the system I was very happy with the results, as bass seemed tighter and less boomy.

### Rocking out with Roxy Music

After playing a range of songs I discovered – somewhat unsurprisingly given the company's hi-fi leanings – that Silver is first and foremost a very musical system. Articulate, detailed and sensitive to the dynamic requirements of the music, it's a spine-tingling listen – the sleazy atmospherics of the 5.1-channel SACD of Roxy Music's *Avalon* is brilliantly captured, with the system lavishing the title track with detail. There's a silky sparkle to the hi-hats and synths, as well as a lingering spacey reverb on Bryan Ferry's vocals.

Another vital component is its terrific transient response up and down the frequency spectrum. Not only do snare drums sound thick and punchy, you can hear the crisp leading edge as the drumstick hits the skin.

It's also evident in the live bassline of George Benson's jazz-funk classic *Breezin'* – I could hear the bass player's fingers plucking the strings, while the sub's natural agility keeps the groove 'in the pocket'. Stereo imaging is superb too – voices and guitar solos sit in the middle of the front speakers, while other instruments are organised around them.

With movies the 6AV12 is an efficient handler of multichannel action, but its musicality and refinement prevent it from getting really brutal.

**'This delivers one of the most natural and immersive soundstages I've heard from a 5.1 pack'**

Yes, it's engaging and exciting, but too laid back to outmuscle some of the belligerent movie beasts from rival brands.

Playing big, noisy action films with these is like asking Kiri Te Kanawa to perform *Firestarter* by The Prodigy – she'd give it a bloody good go, but her tone is too elegant to nail Keith Flint's grunt and aggression.

However, the most important job of any speaker system is to completely immerse you in the movie without jolting you back to reality, and these speakers achieve this as well as any system I've heard at the price. A major part of that is the wonderful integration across the entire package. Identical drivers in every speaker ensure an even tone, while the incredibly wide dispersion of the FX surrounds creates a seamless, enveloping soundstage, with effects coming at you from every angle. It links up with the front stage too, allowing audio to pass fluidly from front to back.

Skip to the nerve-shredding finale of Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* and the Silvers do a masterful job as Theo lumbers his way through the Bexhill refugee camp. Those enveloping rears keep the scene's tense, eerie atmosphere hanging around you throughout, sporadically peppered with snappy transients and big bass hits. The FX models ping scary-sounding bullets across the back stage, while tanks lumber into view with a deep mechanical growl and the superb W12 sub shudders your chest with well-controlled explosions. Astonishing stuff.

The 6AV12 array is therefore a highly impressive system offering top-drawer performance, elegant looks and stunning build quality. Monitor Audio's refined, responsive sound works wonders for music, and with movies it delivers one of the most natural and immersive soundstages I've heard. It's not the most gung-ho lineup around but those who prize beauty over brawn will love the 6AV12 to bits ■

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### SILVER 6 FLOORSTANDERS

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 6in RST C-CAM bass driver; 1 x 6in RST C-CAM mid/bass driver; 1 x 1in C-CAM gold dome tweeter  
**ENCLOSURE:** Dual-chamber bass reflex with twin HiVe II port system  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 35Hz-35kHz  
**SENSITIVITY:** 90dB  
**POWER HANDLING:** 150W  
**DIMENSIONS:** 185(w) x 885(h) x 240(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 16.5kg

#### SILVER CENTRE

**DRIVE UNITS:** 2 x 6in RST C-CAM mid/bass drivers; 1 x 1in C-CAM gold dome tweeter  
**ENCLOSURE:** Sealed  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 45Hz-35kHz  
**SENSITIVITY:** 90dB  
**POWER HANDLING:** 150W  
**DIMENSIONS:** 500(w) x 185(h) x 200(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 9.6kg

#### SILVER FX BIPOLE/DIPOLE REARS

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 6in RST C-CAM mid/bass driver; 2 x 1in C-CAM gold dome tweeters  
**ENCLOSURE:** Sealed  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 60Hz-35kHz  
**SENSITIVITY:** 87dB  
**POWER HANDLING:** 85W  
**DIMENSIONS:** 311(w) x 250(h) x 130(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 4.69kg

#### SILVER W12 SUBWOOFER

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 12in C-CAM driver with 3in long-throw voice coil  
**ENCLOSURE:** Sealed  
**LOW FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 20Hz  
**ON BOARD POWER:** 500W  
**REMOTE CONTROL:** No (but controls are top-mounted)  
**DIMENSIONS:** 340(w) x 340(h) x 380(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 20.1kg  
**CONNECTIONS:** Stereo phono input and output; LFE input and output

### HCC VERDICT



#### Monitor Audio Silver 6AV12

→ £2,875 Approx → [www.monitoraudio.com](http://www.monitoraudio.com)  
 → 01268 740580

**HIGHS:** Stunning design and build quality; immersive, gap-free soundstage; meticulous detail; tightly integrated bass

**LOWS:** Lacks the potency of some systems; refined sound better suited to music

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



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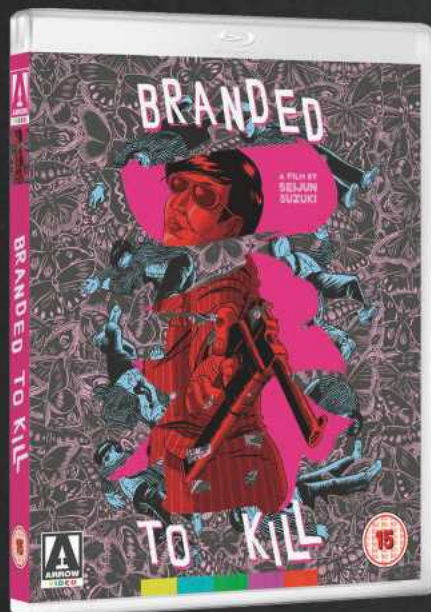
“[Borowczyk's films]  
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that very few other things do...”  
Terry Gilliam

**“DAZZLING”**  
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**Adrian Justins** believes Samsung's premium 'traditional TV' has a lot going for it

# A Smart TV from the old school

**WHEN FRIENDS, FAMILY** or the random people I meet at weddings ask me 'What TV should I buy?', I have to find out what they know about 4K and whether or not they have a preference for flat or curved. With that in mind, Samsung's UE46H7000, which is flat and Full HD, feels refreshingly simple.

Not that this is a budget telly. The UE46H7000 may sit a few tiers from the top of Samsung's 2014 TV cake, but it is the company's most expensive regular form, 1080p model. Above it are curved 1080p models (the H8000 range), 4K screens (the HU7500s) and curved 4K offerings (the HU8500s).

In deference to its pricier siblings, this 46-inch doesn't have all of Samsung's most advanced picture processing tools. For instance, while the UE46H7000 has an 800Hz CMR panel with micro dimming, up the range you can enjoy 1000Hz and 1200Hz refresh rates with micro dimming 'ultimate', which scans more blocks of pixels. But while the edge-lit UE46H7000 might not be blessed with the latest PurColor colour management either, it comes bountifully equipped with a quad core processor, plus backlight scanning and features such as Black Tone, Flesh Tone, Dynamic Contrast and Gamma adjustment. MotionPlus options comprise Clear, Standard, Smooth and Custom, which allows you to tinker with the blur, judder and LED clear motion settings.

In terms of design, not so long ago Samsung was practically the Apple of the TV world, unleashing eye-catching new looks that wowed the AV crowd and triggered a spate of copycat models from its rivals. Those days are gone and there's not much to get excited about when it comes to talking about the UE46H7000's appearance. It's pleasant enough, and

the build quality is reassuringly sturdy, but the frame and stand don't set my pulse racing. Maybe we've just hit something of a brick wall as far as TV design goes – or maybe I've seen too many curved screens lately...

The set's roster of connections is fulsome, with no obvious or unobvious deficiencies. The sockets are all positioned so that they face either to the side or back, rather than downwards, in a configuration more conducive to mounting on a stand than on a wall.

Samsung supplies two remote controls with the set, one a bog-standard black plastic brick, which is perfectly fine for channel-hopping. The other is a sleek-looking silver pebble, with a smattering of buttons surrounding a central trackpad. This can be used as a point and click device, shining a laser-like beam on the screen enabling much quicker navigation of menu screens that have multiple options, such as the EPG, apps page and onscreen keyboard. The pebble also contains the microphone for voice control (gesture operation requires an optional USB camera). Samsung says its voice operation has been refined since last year but I'm still not convinced. It's far from foolproof and often takes just as long, if not longer, to execute commands, especially as the set sometimes asks for confirmation before performing simple tasks such as switching the TV off.

As a higher-end Full HD screen, the UE46H7000 comes with just about the best of Samsung's latest Smart TV and wireless networking skills. Multi-screen lets you watch >

The 46H7000 comes with the now standard dual remotes



The slim bezel and curved pedestal keep the Samsung looking neat and tidy



## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** Full HD Smart LED TV

**POSITION:** Near the top of Samsung's current 1080p lineup

**PEERS:** Sony KDL-46W905A; Panasonic TX-47AS740

## JOYPAD JUNKIES

Discover the 10 best sports games for your bigscreen, p28







two sources (or two channels) side-by-side, whilst Screen Mirroring lets you wirelessly watch what's on your smart phone or tablet screen, and a Smart View app reverses the roles and lets you watch content from the TV on a portable device.

The provision of twin tuners means that, for example, someone can watch *Pointless* on the TV whilst someone else is watching *The Chase* on a smartphone. Twin tuners also allow simultaneous recording of one channel to a USB hard disk whilst watching another.

An external drive is also needed to take full advantage of the set's Football Mode, an imperfectly executed idea for the imminent

**'A great, Smart screen to operate, with excellent integration with a home network and portable devices'**

World Cup. It works by automatically creating highlight clips according to the noise level of the crowd, but when I tried it I found it considered the half-time whistle worth watching but not a stunning goal from Luis Suarez for Liverpool. It does let you manually create highlights instead but it's almost not worth bothering with – because to use the highlights feature you're forced to endure picture settings that are unwatchable, with over-saturated colours and excessive brightness. Hmm.

On a more positive note, Samsung has made it quicker and easier to navigate the Smart Hub panels, and the repository

of on-demand and catch-up services is satisfyingly overflowing with all the popular providers. You won't be bored here.

### Falling short of top spot

In terms of picture performance the 46H7000 is no David Moyes, but nor is it a Jose Mourinho. Even watching football in one of the normal viewing modes (I found Movie to suit my tastes) the screen betrays its inability to maintain resolution with movement. Playing around with MotionPlus can sharpen up the clarity of the players a tad but footy on *Match of the Day* is marred by the mushiness of the pitch, especially in wide shots.

Generally, the H7000 doesn't seem to have the stability and smoothness of last year's F8000 model. Another minor issue is clouding in dark scenes caused by slight light leakage at the bottom edge of the screen. This can at least be neatly eradicated when watching letterboxed movies by engaging the set's Cinema Black bars.

Contrast, colour fidelity and brightness are, however, all good, with the set imparting vivid, engaging punch to HD visuals. Off-axis viewing is solid, too.

Blu-ray movies pass muster. *Oblivion* for example, looks lovingly pristine and filmlike at 24p. Want it smoother? Well, when Jack and Julia explore the ruins of the Empire State Building I noticed no jerkiness and no artefacts with Motion Plus's judder setting set to 3 or 4. There's strong detail in Jack's facial features, including his bristles and a cut to his skin. But in the gloom of the Scavs' cave where Jack is interrogated, shadow detail is not as good as you'd expect to find, thanks to moderately crushed blacks.

The UE46H7000 has active 3D, and comes with two pairs of lightweight specs. Side-by-side 3D (Sky's 3D channel) is a resolution dead zone but at least crosstalk is virtually non-existent. And as long as the overzealous backlight is moderated, Full HD 3D Blu-rays, such as *Gravity*, prove quite satisfying with good contrast and clarity.

In terms of its sonics, the UE46H7000 has quite impressive power for an edge-lit LED screen, claiming a 40W output. It doesn't have enough bass for my liking but vocal clarity is good and more than acceptable for daytime watching, although it was hopelessly lost at sea trying to deal with the mutterings of the recent BBC drama *Jamaica Inn*.

Overall, the UE46H7000 is a great screen to own and operate (gimmicky Football mode aside), providing excellent integration with a home network, portable devices and Smart TV services. Yet its picture performance isn't quite up to what you might expect from a high-end screen, with some motion and backlight flaws dampening my enthusiasm. If anything, it's made me more certain that investing in a top-spec 4K model is the way to go ■

### ON THE MENU



→ Samsung's menu system, backed up by quad core processing, is achingly smart and sophisticated. The same doesn't quite apply to the 'Football mode', though...

### SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** Yes. Active (two pairs of glasses supplied)  
**4K:** No. 1,920 x 1,080

**TUNER:** 2 x Freeview HD; 2 x Freesat HD  
**CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI; 2 x USB; component video; composite video; RGB Scart; Ethernet; stereo analogue audio; satellite RF x 2; terrestrial RF; digital optical audio; headphone socket; IR control; CI slot

**SOUND:** 20W (2 x 10W)

**BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A

**CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A

**DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,033(w) x 597(h) x 33(d)mm

**WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 11.3kg

**FEATURES:** Ultra Clear panel; 800Hz refresh rate (200Hz plus backlight scanning); Micro Dimming; 3D HyperReal Engine; Mega Contrast; built-in Wi-Fi; USB and DLNA multimedia playback (AVCHD, AVI, XVID, DIVX, MPG, MP4, MKV, MOV, WMV, M2TS, JPEG, BMP, PNG, FLAC, MP3, M4A); DLNA Allshare; web browser; Skype; voice and gesture control (optional camera required); dual remotes; USB PVR recording; BD Wise; Wi-Fi direct; Football Mode; Multi-screen mode; Picture-in-Picture; Screen Mirroring; DTS Premium Sound 5.1; DTS Studio Sound

### HCC VERDICT



#### Samsung UE46H7000

→ £1,300 Approx → [www.samsung.co.uk](http://www.samsung.co.uk)

→ Tel: 0870 2420 303

**HIGHS:** Excellent Smart TV selection; decent overall picture quality; great to use; impressive connectivity

**LOWS:** Motion resolution not the best; gimmicky Football Mode; audio bass-lite; a 4K screen isn't that much more of a premium

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★



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# LG aims to do it all

It was only a matter of time before a brand took the growing 'speakerbase' concept and added a Blu-ray playback element. **Mark Craven** finds out if LG is onto a good idea

**A FEW YEARS** ago the idea of a speakerbase was just a twinkle in the eye of a Bose engineer. But since the American audio brand popularised the notion of a soundbar that sits under your TV, rather than in front of it, and therefore provides greater cabinet space for larger drivers, plenty of other companies have had a pop, including high-end marques like Speakercraft and Canton and mass market corps such as Panasonic, Sony and LG.

The latter's debut entrant to the market was the LAP340, which it dubbed a 'soundplate'. Offering basic features (optical digital audio input and Bluetooth) and a 4.1 speaker array, it was disappointingly average considering the £350 price. For 2014, the Korean company has gone back to the drawing board, thrown the drawing board out of the



## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** Soundbase with wireless sub and built-in Smart BD player

**POSITION:** LG's premium soundbase for 2014

**PEERS:** Canton DM50; Bose Solo TV



window, and conceived the LAB540. This retails for £150 more than its predecessor, but a glance at the spec sheet suggests it also offers a whole lot more.

### Jack of all trades

The LAB540 is, again, described by LG as a soundplate, only this time around it incorporates a 3D-capable Blu-ray player, plus Ethernet- or Wi-Fi-powered access to LG's Smart TV portal, and media streaming over a home network or from USB. Oh, and it also comes armed with a wireless subwoofer.

Connectivity is greatly improved, too. Naturally, considering it's a disc spinner, it offers an HDMI output. Yet there's also an HDMI input as well as optical digital audio, making it possible to hookup two external components. I tested it with my Sky+HD box plumbed in via HDMI.

Style-wise the LG LAB540 is just about right. The main speaker/disc playing unit is very neat and tidy, a slim-line box with a silver-effect trim, front metallic grille and dimpled top plate. Connections are well-spaced out around the back (although I'd prefer the USB input to be front-mounted) and there's a front display that throws up nicely legible reminders of what mode/input the unit is set to.

The soundplate is not particularly heavy, and therefore doesn't feel particularly robust. LG's literature suggests it can accommodate



Use the LG's USB port to hook up Android devices and external drives

any screen up to 38kg, but I still wasn't comfortable with the idea of heaving my lighter-than-38kg Panasonic plasma on top to find out. Nor is it the deepest of soundbases, so some larger desktop TV stands might look a bit ungainly.

The subwoofer is weightier and aesthetically unobtrusive. It stands vertically, with feet to lift it from the ground and give its rear port space to breath, and can be placed anywhere within reach of a power point. Wireless connection is faultless – the sub had melded brains with the main unit before I'd even got to the relevant page in the manual.

Hooked up to a display, the LAB540 greets you with LG's traditional AV home menu, with natty icons offering gateways to Smart Share

(for finding content on disc, USB or networked devices); Premium (a curated selection of welcome apps, including Now TV, Spotify, iPlayer, Amazon Instant Video, Netflix and YouTube); LG Smart World (a portal of other apps, not much to see here...); My Apps (where you can build your own library up to 500MB); Input (for choosing between optical in, USB, Bluetooth and HDMI); and Settings. In this latter one, you'll discover a DRC (Dynamic Range Control) option that is set to Auto as default, rather than Off, and the option to upscale video over the HDMI output to 4K. I'll give £5 to the first person that uses that option.

Zippping around the menus with the rather spongy-buttoned handset is quick, to a point. The Settings menu is well-oiled, but as soon as you get into the app side of things operation can slow to a grind while the LAB540 knocks on the server's front door. Also, I discovered that if you press the Home button when you are already on the Home screen, the LAB540 panics and shows you a blank white screen. And on some occasions when switching inputs or powering up with a disc in the slot, I was greeted by a blacked-out display. Annoying.

Control is also available by LG's AV Remote app. Using this allows you to employ the Private Sound Mode, whereby audio is sent via Wi-Fi to your Smart device – the idea being you can then listen with headphones. Clever.

### Listen up!

The audio performance of the LAB540 is a mixed bag, impressing in some aspects, and frustrating in others.

On the positive side, the wireless subwoofer makes quite an impact, particular in the upper bass echelons of music material and film soundtracks. With *Iron Maiden: Somewhere Back In Time Live* (Sky Arts HD), Steve Harris' frantic, galloping basslines and Nicko McBrain's thumping drum beats hang together well, with the woofer keeping speed with a nice, punchy tone. This same weight ensures that musical moments of broadcast TV, such as *Masterchef's* near-constant background tunes, sound far more fulsome than on a traditional telly.

The main unit is designed for screens upto 52in, and 38kg





Yet while the woofer patrols a good chunk of the frequency range (LG doesn't specify a crossover point) you'll find its shortcomings with genuine LFE. The opening to *Gravity* is accompanied by an omnipotent bass thrum that sinks rather low. Where a specialist sub, such as the SVS SB-2000 I tested recently, carries this off with panache, LG's model can't impart the same level of room-bothering fear, nor offer the same control. It sounds a bit unruly; making a general low-level growl rather

## 'A true convergence product, offering a simple upgrade over TV audio and adding plenty of features'

than fluid, deep notes. I found I had to reduce the sub's output when watching BDs at anything approaching an exciting volume level.

In fact, being careful with the volume control was vital while living with the LG. It does its best work at low levels, where its unflustered amps can keep things sounding well-behaved. Yet step up a notch and cracks start to appear, particularly at high frequencies. Cymbals and hi-hats in music sound splashy and bereft of bite, and higher pitched vocals, such as Aerosmith's Steve Tyler on *Rocks* (CD) lack body. There's a lack of integration between LG's sub and four-channel main speaker that's easy to detect, leaving things disjointed. And this counts against it with movie soundtracks, too. The less-than-stellar tweeter performance means Foley effects are short on impact, and overburdened by the mid-range.

Therefore, the LAB540 is much more enjoyable when there's not a lot going on – the majority of TV shows, where the emphasis is solidly on the mid-range, cause it no problems. In that regard I suppose it nails the *raison d'être* of a soundbar.

It offers a decent stereo spread, too, with front-stage pans coming across well. Yet despite labelling two of its channels as surround left/right (the output of which can be individually adjusted) the LG's soundfield is very much in front of you. With the space debris sequence in *Gravity*, what I know is a reference-grade mix on a fully-fledged 5.1 array becomes much less emotionally satisfying. The LAB540 conveys the dynamism of the soundmix as Sandra Bullock's hapless astronaut ping-pongs around the screen, but without any sense of envelopment. Furthermore, with no centre channel to tweak, you can only attempt to raise the dialogue level by adjusting both front channels separately, and this is the sort of thing you won't want to do more than once. And while it's possible to tame the mid-range slightly by avoiding the Cinema preset and sticking with Standard, it's still not well balanced.

### Features first

Not a rave review, then, but LG's LAB540 does have its merits. It's a true convergence product, offering a simple upgrade path over TV audio and adding Blu-ray playback, home networking and VOD to the party. Operation is simple (minus the odd hiccup), the app controller is useful, and installation (helped by the wireless sub) is lemon squeezy. However, there are better soundbases available for less money, so if audio performance is your key concern, there are rival products to audition ■

### ON THE MENU



→ The user interface sports the traditional LG design. It's a great layout and quick to browse via the handset (although there's no 'magic remote' offered here)

### SPECIFICATIONS

**DRIVE UNITS:** 2 x 'front' full-range; 2 x 'surround' full range  
**AMPLIFICATION:** 320W total (160W for main unit, plus 160W subwoofer)  
**CONNECTIONS:** Ethernet; HDMI input; HDMI output (ARC); USB; optical digital audio  
**DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA:** Passthrough/  
 Passthrough  
**SEPARATE SUB:** Yes. Wireless  
**REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes. And app control  
**DIMENSIONS:** 700(w) x 39.5(h) x 320(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 4.6kg  
**FEATURES:** BD/CD/DVD playback; DLNA/USB media player/renderer; built-in Wi-Fi; Wi-Fi Direct; Cinema, Standard and Music presets; channel level adjust; LG Smart Hub including video-on-demand apps and music/games; AV Sync Delay; 4K upscaling over HDMI output; Bluetooth; Private Sound mode; Dynamic Range control

### HCC VERDICT



#### LG LAB540

→ £500 Approx → [www.lg.com/uk](http://www.lg.com/uk)

→ Tel: 0844 847 5454

**HIGHS:** Convenient convergence product; decent Smart hub and VOD features; sounds better than your telly; HDMI inputs

**LOWS:** Minor operational niggles; average high-frequency performance; harsh sound at high volumes

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★



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## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Affordable 5.1  
speaker array

**POSITION:**  
JBL's entry-level  
floorstander  
speaker range

**PEERS:**  
Wharfedale  
Diamond 100 HCP;  
Tannoy Mercury Vi

**Ed Selley** reviews a 5.1 array that will appeal to anyone with a tight budget and a penchant for largescale sonics – as long as they're not too style-conscious...

# Affordable floorstanders

**THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION** of a brand is a curious thing. JBL is one of the most venerable outfits in the market and has an extensive range, including lush high-end models such as the Everest flagship. Yet in the UK it has a rather low profile, one that is largely influenced by its compact speakers and desktop audio biz.

This often means that the full-size speakers that JBL offers can sneak under the radar, which is a shame when the specifications of the Studio 2 series are considered. This seven-strong range of standmounts, floorstanders, centres and subwoofers looks to provide a considerable amount of speaker for your money.

It also manages to include one of JBL's most distinctive pieces of in-house technology. All Studio 2 speakers feature a 1in, horn-loaded HDI tweeter, derived from the design used in much more expensive models. The benefits of mounting a tweeter in this way, says JBL, is improved dispersion and off-axis response over a conventional dome design. It can often lead to increased sensitivity, too – although in the case of the Studio 220 bookshelves in particular (which claim a sensitivity of 86dB) they don't appear to be any more easily-driven than the competition.

These tweeters are partnered with 'Poly Plas' (plastic) drivers and here, again, the JBLs are a distinctive design. The floorstanding Studio 270 makes use of a 6.5in unit, as is typical of a speaker at this price point, but proceeds to partner it with a 4in midrange driver that makes the 270 a genuine three-way offering. The presence of this 4in driver is also helpful in terms of integration with the Studio 220 surround and 225C Centre, which only employ this 4in cone (larger versions of both with 6.5in drivers are also available) and the HDI tweeter.

The SUB 250P woofer is perhaps the most conventional member of the family. It features a 10in version of the Poly Plas driver, powered by a 200W Class D amplifier. Connections and controls are pretty much what you'd expect at the bargain price, save for the SUB 250P having to make do without a dedicated LFE input. Like the rest of the range, the sub is rear-ported – in this case with an absolute whopper – but in use it doesn't seem to be that intrusive in terms of placement near to walls.

## A rash of right angles

The appearance of the JBLs might be politely described as functional and less charitably as ugly. The black finish of our review samples doesn't really make for a desperately attractive speaker, even though there are a few touches towards styling such as the rounded cabinet edges and gloss finished tops. The JBLs look fairly austere without their grilles and somewhat monolithic with them on. The 225C centre is a particularly unfortunate-looking thing as it doesn't feature the rounded edge at the front that the other speakers do, and JBL in its infinite wisdom has decided to gloss the ends rather than the actual top of the cabinet. You can get all these speakers in a wood finish but I don't think they're ever going to be considered furniture.

While they aren't pretty they are all fairly substantial in terms of build and finish. Everything seems carefully assembled and there are some pleasing additions, like the

You can get all this loudspeaker real estate for a little over £1,000



The Studio 270 uses a three-way design, with the horn-loaded tweeter joined by mid and bass drivers

rubber feet that can be fitted with spikes and the protective guards for the tweeters.

Setup proved simple enough. Although all the speakers are rear-ported, none of them seemed too concerned by proximity to a wall and best results were gained with no toe-in on the front speakers and the SUB 250P kept on-axis at the front. Connected to a Pioneer SC-LX57 AV receiver, the JBLs didn't throw up any unwelcome surprises during auto setup and seemed happiest with a 50Hz crossover for the 270s and 80Hz for the centre and surround channels.

Simple installation completed, they begin to show some impressive attributes. With the same tweeter and 4in driver present across all five speakers, the integration between them is extremely convincing. Those neat horn-loaded tweeters do indeed seem to have really excellent dispersion and this makes for a wide and extremely even front soundstage. Furthermore, there is precious little sign of harshness or aggression, even with the output on the Pioneer turned up high. The Studios power their way through *Wreck-It Ralph* with a real sense of the layered and lavish soundstage that brings the movie's Sugar Rush scenes to life.

Further listening suggests that the decision to use this 4in midrange driver with the tweeter pays dividends in terms of detail and smoothness, because the JBLs are operating efficiently at a frequency point where many rivals are having to think about effecting a

crossover. Coupled with the tweeter, the result is immersive dialogue and excellent fine detail retrieval. These are attributes equally useful to music reproduction, and in both stereo and 5.1 the JBLs are consistently capable.

Further down the frequency response, the Studios are a little less assured. The bass response of the Studio 270 is fairly deep but

**'The Studios power their way through *Wreck-It Ralph* with a real sense of the layered and lavish mix'**

slightly soft and the SUB 250P seems to be similar. During the two-hour bass fest of *Pacific Rim*, the JBLs never seem to lack absolute level but there is a softness to the robot-on-monster action that dulls some of the impact. The news isn't all bad, though, as while it might be fractionally soft, the SUB 250P isn't something you could accuse of being slow or bloated. Whatever lack of absolute slam it might suffer from, it remains impressively controlled even when provoked.

This means that if you don't exist solely on a diet of explosions, the JBLs are capable of a scale and presence that can elude speakers at this price point, particularly smaller designs. The marvellously atmospheric score to *Rush* is handled with an assurance that is beyond many competitors and any broadcast TV that benefits from an expansive and detailed performance is treated to this in no uncertain terms. The Studios also manage to retain most of their talents at lower volumes – useful for anyone looking to use their speakers all the time and not simply for movie night.

### Accomplished all-rounders

Taken as a whole, this is a very accomplished and appealing speaker package on many levels. JBL's experience with its horn-loaded tweeter and the unusual decision to make the affordable Studio 2 a three-way design has resulted in an array that sounds big, smooth and civilised with a wide variety of material. The slight softness to the bass response might put off full-on action fans but people with wider tastes will enjoy the spread of ability that this system possess.

The only real fly in the ointment is that this ability comes in such a utilitarian container. There is no escaping that the Studios have to concede ground to rivals in this area, although as ever, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

And I would argue that the just-over-a-grand asking price counters this. There aren't many options for floorstanders on this budget, and you shouldn't expect them to look like they've come straight from a Milan catwalk ■

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### STUDIO 270 FLOORSTANDERS

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 6.5in Poly Plas bass driver; 1 x 4in Poly Plas mid-range driver; 1 x 1in horn-loaded HDI tweeter  
**ENCLOSURE:** Ported  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 45Hz-22kHz  
**SENSITIVITY:** 88dB  
**POWER HANDLING:** 200W  
**DIMENSIONS:** 1,010(h) x 237(w) x 244(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 16.1kg

#### STUDIO 220 SURROUNDS

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 4in Poly Plas mid/bass driver and 1 x 1in horn-loaded HDI tweeter  
**ENCLOSURE:** Ported  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 60Hz-22kHz  
**SENSITIVITY:** 86dB  
**POWER HANDLING:** 120W  
**DIMENSIONS:** 260(h) x 237(w) x 180(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 3.7kg

#### STUDIO 225C CENTRE

**DRIVE UNITS:** 2 x 4in Poly Plas mid/bass drivers; 1 x 1in horn-loaded HDI tweeter  
**ENCLOSURE:** Ported  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 60Hz-22kHz  
**SENSITIVITY:** 88dB  
**POWER HANDLING:** 120W  
**DIMENSIONS:** 165(h) x 535(w) x 187(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 7.9kg

#### SUB 250P SUBWOOFER

**DRIVE UNITS:** 10in Poly Plas woofer  
**ENCLOSURE:** Ported  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 32-150Hz  
**ON BOARD POWER:** 200W  
**REMOTE CONTROL:** No  
**DIMENSIONS:** 419(h) x 341(w) x 389(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 15.1kg  
**CONNECTIONS:** Left and right line-level input

### HCC VERDICT



#### JBL Studio 2 series 5.1

→ £1,070 Approx → <http://uk.jbl.com>

→ 01707 278113

**HIGHS:** Clear, open and expressive performance; unfussy placement and solid build  
**LOWS:** Decidedly functional appearance; slight lack of low-end impact

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★



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**Mark Craven** is mostly impressed by the sonic ability of Samsung's latest all-in-one system, but wonders if its form factor can still win over the cool kids

# Multichannel sound fights back

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Tallboy all-in-one Blu-ray system

**POSITION:**  
Samsung's range-topper for 2014

**PEERS:**  
Panasonic SC-BTT885; LG BH9540TW

**ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEMS HAVE** been a staple of home cinema for a good while, and in some regards haven't changed much. Where once you got a DVD player/amplifier main unit, accompanied by five somewhat plasticky speakers and a subwoofer, you now get a BD player/amplifier unit... accompanied by five somewhat plasticky speakers and a subwoofer. Yes, the feature skills of the average home-theatre-in-a-box are greatly improved in 2014, but the concept itself is achingly traditional.

Not that this stops the likes of Samsung continuing to support it, and this year the company offers seven all-in-one packages, of varying configurations and spec, of which the HT-H7750WM auditioned here is the flagship, retailing for around £850. It arrives in a large,

unwieldy box. Open it up and you're presented with a neatly stacked collection of speakers, amp unit, plinths and accessories that immediately signals you're in for a long afternoon before you can even think about sitting down to a movie...

## Standing tall

As befits its top-dog status, the HT-H7750WM uses tallboy speakers for the front left/right and surround channels, plus a smaller centre speaker. While the centre and surround offer two midrange drivers and a tweeter, the front pair feature an additional top-mounted driver, which can be angled via a dial on the rear. It's this that enables Samsung to refer to the setup as a 7.1 array, but in a front-height sense rather than rear surround.



Assembling the tallboys is a bit of a slog, as they arrive in three parts – two that join together to form the speaker, plus a plinth stand. The rears, as is typical these days, plumb into a separate wireless receiver. The rest, including the subwoofer, hook into the BD unit via supplied speaker wire, complete with colour-matched tags to ensure you get everything in the right place.

**'Robin Hood's castle siege, which provides a layered soundmix packed with effects, is an enjoyable listen'**

The BD unit looks similar to much of Samsung's 2013 lineup, and offers similar tech – the right-hand side gives you a peek at its valve amp, which works in combination with its digital innards. This process, which strives to deliver a warmer sound, has been part of Samsung's shtick since 2012.

Features of the main unit include dual HDMI inputs, USB connectivity, Bluetooth, NFC, Smart device screen mirroring, Ethernet/Wi-Fi network connection, access to Samsung's Smart Hub and its full suite of UK terrestrial catchup channels, and, of course, disc playback. It is, in other words, fully-loaded, even offering compatibility with the brand's new range of multiroom speakers (although this element wasn't tested).

Looks-wise, the in-er-face silver finish of last year's F9750W has been replaced by a more conservative black livery. There's more of an emphasis on angles, too – even the tallboy plinths flaunt a jutting design. The user interface is more stylish, greeting with you an icon-based layout that's simple to master and swift to navigate.

### Yay! Surround sound!

Although it's stating the obvious, possibly the best thing about the HT-H7750WM is

**Samsung: still rocking its valve amp tech**



that it's a true multichannel AV solution. Soundbars and soundbases may be catching the eyes of consumers, but this dazzles the ears in a way that they simply can't, by providing authentic surround sound and all its benefits. For instance, spin up any 5.1 Blu-ray and you're rewarded with a sense of immersion, as surround channel effects and front-to-back pans work their magic. With Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood* and its climactic beach battle, this means horses' hooves thunder through my living room, and arrows rain down on my sitting position, rather than tip-toeing around in front of my display. Just how it should be.

And Samsung's speakers sound good, too, combining with the amp to carve out a clean, articulate delivery. *Robin Hood's* castle siege sequence, which provides a layered soundmix packed with effects, is an enjoyable listen. The sounds of squelching feet, tumbling brickwork and licking flames are afforded real presence from the mid-range drivers and tweeters, and the delightfully random nature of Russell Crowe's English accent is easy to make out via the centre channel.

Tonally, the HT-H7750WM proffers the same warm tone as its predecessor, but perhaps dialled down a touch. There's an element of user adjustment available here, too, with the system providing an equaliser and a range of post-processing modes. Custom sound profiles can be saved.

Music played from CDs and streamed via Bluetooth again showcases the strengths of the system, with the front stage capturing the sugary wall-of-sound instincts of The Beach Boys' *God Only Knows*. Where some setups can come across as too clinical, this is inviting and full-bodied.

There are, of course, limitations to the Samsung's audio. While I found a level that was ideal for my tastes and my room, those who want to crank it even louder will find it begins to sound strained. Meanwhile, the subwoofer is competent but no more, becoming a bit loose and flabby as it drops low. Bombastic LFE moments, such as the sequence in *Oblivion* where Tom Cruise falls into the ruins of the library, are attacked with relish, but not refinement.

And one final concern with the HT-H7750WM is its build quality and form factor. I've never met an all-in-one tallboy system that didn't feature slightly wobbly speakers, and this is no exception. There's also a plasticky, lightweight quality to the cabinets that you might not expect at this price. Neither am I convinced that installing these tallboys, and their associated wireless transmitter, at the rear of a room is entirely practical for many setups. There's no doubting the Samsung's talents and feature set, but the product concept as a whole feels a bit old-fashioned ■

### ON THE MENU



→ A lush hi-res interface for you to zip around, helped by plenty of processing power and sensible navigation. Good work

### SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** Yes  
**UPSCALING:** Yes, To Ultra HD  
**CONNECTIONS:** 2 x HDMI inputs; HDMI (ARC) output; optical digital audio input; analogue stereo input; Ethernet port; USB  
**SACD/DVD-A PLAYBACK:** No/No  
**DTS-HD/DOLBY TRUEHD DECODING:** Yes/Yes  
**CLAIMED POWER OUTPUT:** 1,000W  
**DIMENSIONS (MAIN UNIT):** 430(w) x 55(h) x 312(d)mm  
**WEIGHT (MAIN UNIT):** NA  
**FEATURES:** Built-in Wi-Fi; FM tuner; Bluetooth; NFC; wireless transmission for rear speakers; DLNA media streaming; USB media playback; app/VOD portal; valve amp technology; dual core processor; screen mirroring; user EQ; Custom Sound modes; Blu-ray/3D Blu-ray/CD playback; compatible with Samsung Multiroom hardware; DTS Neo: Fusion processing; Football Mode; MP3 Enhancer

### HCC VERDICT



#### Samsung HT-H7750WM

→ £850 Approx → [www.samsung.co.uk](http://www.samsung.co.uk)  
 → Tel: 0330 726 7864

**HIGHS:** Offers a dizzying array of features; authentic, detail-driven surround sound; external hookup options

**LOWS:** Can become harsh at loud levels; subwoofer lacks refinement; uninspiring speaker build; lengthy setup; imposing in your room

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★

# Breaking through the price barrier

Despite some weaknesses, Sony's new sub-£2,000 home cinema projector is outstanding value, reckons **John Archer**

**I'M FEELING PUMPED** today to be looking at the new Sony VPL-HW40ES. This adds a new entry-level option to the company's projector range, putting the brand's SXRD technology within the grasp of many more people thanks to a £1,850 price tag. Previously, the starting point was the VPL-HW55ES, which retails for around £2,700.

Of course, while this makes it a tantalising proposition straight from the off, I'll be looking out for cut corners and seriously down-graded specs before I can pronounce the VPL-HW40ES the bargain I'm hoping it will be.

## Doppelganger design

There's little sign from the outside that the VPL-HW40ES is nearly a grand cheaper than its VPL-HW55ES sibling. Available in gloss white or gloss black finishes, it's identical in design to Sony's step up model, sporting the same large footprint, vaguely elliptical chassis and large, centrally mounted lens.

The projector is remarkably easy to set up. Above the lens are simple horizontal and vertical image shift wheels that deliver a much wider range of image movement (+/-71%) than I had expected. Their mechanisms aren't especially precise, meaning you have to do a little work to get the image in exactly the right spot for your screen. But it's the range of movement that really matters. There's plenty of zoom (1.6x) at your disposal, too.

Connections are tucked under a ledge down the projector's left side, and comprise two

### AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Full HD 3D SXRD projector

**POSITION:**  
Sony's entry-level home cinema PJ

**PEERS:**  
Sony VPL-HW55ES;  
Epson EH-TW7200;  
BenQ W1500

3D-capable v1.4 HDMI inputs, a D-Sub PC port, a component video port, a LAN port for adding an optional external 3D transmitter (though the projector does contain an internal transmitter), an RS-232 port for system integration, and an IR line input. You can add a wireless HDMI system to the VPL-HW40ES in the shape of the optional IFU-WH1 add-on.

A disappointment where connectivity is concerned is that there's no 12V trigger output. There are more affordable projectors from rival brands that provide this system-simplifying hookup, and it may make the VPL-HW40ES a no-go for those with automated screens.

At the heart of the Sony can be found a trio of proprietary SXRD imaging chips, delivering a native Full HD resolution and, in this case, a claimed brightness output of 1,700 Lumens. There's no claimed contrast ratio for the VPL-HW40ES, however, and it relies on a dynamic system to deliver its maximum contrast performance, meaning you certainly won't always – or even often – see a full 1,700 Lumens coming out of the lens.

As with Sony's latest TVs, the VPL-HW40ES provides a strong suite of picture presets, and is unusually clever at selecting the best one to use for different types of content. But if you do want to tinker with pictures yourself, there's plenty of stuff to get your teeth into, including colour management via Sony's non-standard but reasonably intuitive Real Colour Processing (RCP) system, and a suite of gamma settings.

Settling down to watch a few movies on the VPL-HW40ES reveals that it's a chip off the new Sony block, proving again that SXRD technology now has cinematic chops even at the relatively low end of the market.

Pictures are superbly crisp. The phenomenal detailing visible on the *Captain Phillips* Blu-ray (which is derived from a 4K native master) is done full justice, with edges so sharp they could cut glass. There's a touch of noise associated with this outstanding sharpness if you use the Reality Creation system, which

You can get the Sony HW40ES in either a black or white chassis







‘The phenomenal detailing of *Captain Phillips* is done justice, with edges sharp enough to cut glass’



may persuade some to turn it off. But personally I found its benefits outweighed this small negative, so I left it on, albeit with the resolution element of the processing set low. And that slight noise issue is reduced if you run the PJ with its lamp set to low rather

## 'A chip off the new Sony block – this PJ proves yet again that SXR technology has cinematic chops'

than its default high level. This is something I'd suggest anyway, as it gives you the lowest running noise (I found this PJ very quiet – Sony claims a figure of 21dB) and the best black levels.

The clarity in the Sony's pictures isn't just down to its detailing. Colour performance is great for the money, delivering a range and subtlety of tone that works well with both the below-decks sequences in *Captain Phillips* and the potent, vibrant final 'happy ending' sequence in *Frozen*. This combination of dynamism and subtlety is impressive, and its impact on enticing you into any filmic world you're watching can't be over-estimated.

The VPL-HW40ES out-performs its price point, too, with its motion handling. There's little judder with either 2D or 3D footage, and nor is there any significant sign of resolution loss over moving objects, even during camera pans.

Rounding out an excellent image for £1,850 is a well-judged balance between contrast and brightness. Bright parts of dark images look punchy and bold, yet sequences

Side-mounted inputs might make installation a bit messy – and there's no 12V trigger here

like those in the alien structure in *Prometheus* appear reasonably convincingly black and, most important of all, stuffed with shadow detail and greyscale subtleties. This latter shadow detail ability ensures that dark scenes possess more or less the same field depth as bright ones, and proves that the VPL-HW40ES can produce a decent black level without requiring the removal of too much luminance.

### Ghost in the machine

Sony projectors can be a bit hit and miss where 3D is concerned, yet the VPL-HW40ES is one of the brand's better efforts. Rich, bold colours, lots of brightness and some seriously impressive HD detailing join forces with relatively little crosstalk noise. I'm not saying

crosstalk is eradicated, though; the shots in the cavernous space of *Pacific Rim*'s Shatterdome definitely exhibit some signs of double ghosting over distant lines and lights. I found that lowering the projector's 3D Glasses Brightness setting from its default maximum level reduces crosstalk to a point that's pretty easy to live with. The 3D glasses are an optional extra, though (whereas they're bundled on the VPL-HW55ES).

If I had to find a key fault with the VPL-HW40ES, I'd say that it does not deliver the same black level conviction as the higher-priced VPL-HW55ES. Those aforementioned underground *Prometheus* scenes look a little greyer where they should look, well, black. However, the retention of excellent colour response and lots of shadow detail does a fine job of hiding this shortcoming.

Overall, you should be left in no doubt that the VPL-HW40ES is another great projector from the Sony brand. It's not perfect, but it easily justifies its £1,850 ticket ■

### SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** Yes. Active (no glasses supplied)

**4K:** No. 1,920 x 1,080

**CONNECTIONS:** 2 x v1.4 HDMI; component video input; IR input; LAN for 3D transmitter option; RS-232

**BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 1,700 Lumens

**CONTRAST (CLAIMED):** N/A

**DIMENSIONS:** 407(w) x 179(h) x 464(d)mm

**WEIGHT:** 10kg

**FEATURES:** SXRD technology; Reality Creation processing; Panel Alignment processing; +/-71% vertical and horizontal image shift; manual 1.6x zoom; 200W UHP lamp; Real Colour Processing Version 2; dynamic lamp control; Motionflow processing; nine preset picture modes; 21dB claimed fan noise in low lamp mode; built-in 3D transmitter; optional external 3D transmitter; optional wireless HDMI kit



The familiar clicker from Sony – backlit and very neatly laid out

### HCC VERDICT



#### Sony VPL-HW40ES

→ £1,850 Approx → [www.sony.co.uk](http://www.sony.co.uk)

→ Tel: 0871 423 7766

**HIGHS:** Excellent picture quality; runs quietly; great value; easy to set up

**LOWS:** Black level response could be improved; no 12V port; no 3D glasses included for free; minor 3D crosstalk; sizable chassis

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★



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# A media player for the format fanatic

**Martin Pipe** has plenty of devices that offer networking functionality, but none are quite as fully-featured as Dune HD's Base 3D

## AV INFO

### PRODUCT:

High-end media player

### POSITION:

The pinnacle of Dune HD's media player/accessory range

### PEERS:

Mede8er MED1000X3D

**DUNE HD'S BASE 3D** shows how media player manufacturers are rising to the challenge of Smart TVs, tablets and the latest Blu-ray players. Although not ridiculously expensive, the Base 3D is easy to install (it even checks for new firmware when connected) and offers plenty of features that you won't find on non-specialist gear. It's very much a media player for the serious AV enthusiast.

A look at the Base 3D's slim but full-width fascia hints towards just one of its feature strengths – under a flap is a 3.5in SATA HDD bay. Nothing unusual there; many such players can accommodate an internal hard drive for storing all of your favourite movies, photos, TV programmes and music in one secure place. In this instance, though, the drive just slips into the unit, a sprung bracket holding everything in place. No screws or wires to mess around with, in other words.

Dune HD lets the side down somewhat by failing to provide a device-mode USB port that would allow your computer to treat the Base 3D's HDD as an external drive itself. But it's still definitely worth adding your own memory; with an HDD on board, the versatility

of the unit is greatly enhanced. Connect it to your network (Wi-Fi and Ethernet hookups are provided – use the latter for the most robust connection) and you'll find that it's capable of acting as a file-server (SMB), too. In other words, your additional media devices will be able to stream content stored on it. Neat. Local storage alternatives include a trio of USB ports, and an SD slot for convenient playback of photos or video from a digital camera/camcorder, which immediately makes it more user-friendly than most modern Smart TVs.

## Media marshal

Naturally, the Base 3D is also capable of pulling media off other servers lurking on your home network. SMB, NFS and uPnP/DLNA protocols are supported, meaning that it's unlikely you'll encounter any access problems. As regards compatibility with different media types and compression standards, the Base 3D absolutely trounces the average Blu-ray player, and many direct competitors, come to think of it.

Music fans are well catered for. MP3, WMA, FLAC, OGG and WAV audio? You got 'em – and in 24-bit, if available. There's even a





headphone socket for personal listening. A fluorescent display and (sparse) front-panel controls are provided, but selecting tracks is best done with the attractively designed onscreen menu system.

Stereo DTS and Dolby Digital soundtracks can be fed out from the analogue phons on the Base 3D's rear. Coaxial and optical digital audio outputs handle multichannel, but you're more likely to hook the unit up to your AVR via its HDMI port.

Do this and the wonders of Blu-ray-sourced DTS-HD Master Audio and Dolby TrueHD soundtracks (passed through) will be open to you, because the Dune can handle BD

**'Dune HD's Base 3D is quite responsive in use and delivers audio and video to a high standard'**

rips – in native 1080p24, too. The best option is to get the third-party ripping software to generate an ISO disc-image. Note that on selecting this file for playback you don't get the Blu-ray's complex menus – instead, you're presented with a list of chapters. These are left intact for quick selection of a specific scene, and you can choose from 2D and 3D content if available.

For those with a collection of the latter, stereoscopic compatibility from a media player is a real boon. 3D Blu-rays employ a technology known as MVC (Multiview Video Coding) to squeeze the left- and right-eye views into a single stream. The player then transmits it, using a process called frame packing, as a standardised Full HD 3D signal that your display can understand. And guess what? The Base 3D does the same. I tried a couple of 3D BD rips with an Epson EH-TW7200 projector, and they played fine.

The PJ even automatically recognised the 3D format used. With one of them, I did, however, have to engage the projector's 'invert glasses' function to get the correct results.

The Base 3D, like any other hi-def player or digital TV set-top box, is also compatible with the side-by-side and top/bottom 3D formats. Then there are all the video codecs and standards. X.264/H.264, MPEG-1/2, MP4, FLV, MKV... all of the key ones were grist to the Base 3D's mill.

You can even play recorded TV transport-streams (.TS files, both SD and HD), which is handy if you own a PC with tuner. And if you don't, PVR facilities can be added to the Base 3D simply by plugging in a USB tuner. It might not be able to deal with Blu-ray menus, but DVD ones are a different matter. With VIDEO-TS folders and ISO images alike, you get exactly the same features and menus that would be expected when playing the original disc with a conventional DVD player.

Talking of menus, I've only touched the surface. During playback, a pop-up pane provides you with access to various functions. Among them are the ability to change deinterlacing mode (handy for playing back old SD material), zoom, audio lip-sync adjustment, time-search, subtitles and audio track selection.

And then there are all the other things the Dune HD can do that aren't exactly headline features, including internet radio, games (including *Sudoku*, *Chess Challenge* and *Tetris*), Facebook/Twitter apps and a web browser. More features can be added via an app store. You can even control the unit from your smartphone via a free iOS/Android app, which I found to be a perfectly adequate substitute for the no-frills handset.

### Stable performer

It would, of course, all be utterly pointless if the Dune HD had a lousy performance, but it's quite responsive in use and delivers audio and video to a high standard – thanks in part to its high-tech Sigma SMP8673 media processing chip. It's at least as good as a budget 'big-name' Blu-ray player – HD pictures are characterised by strong detail and dynamic range, and the unit has a good stab at SD upscaling. Onboard audio is also fine, although most users will instead be relying on their AV receiver to do the decoding. Network streaming proved to be glitch free, too.

Overall, this is an exciting and worthwhile media player for the AV addict who demands a little more. The full-width design looks great (although it's not the most reassuringly solid of devices) and its format support and ease-of-use are hard to fault. Where it falls foul of the mainstream competition is its provision of video-on-demand apps, but you've probably got a million other devices that access Netflix, haven't you? ■

### ON THE MENU



→ Dune HD's onscreen display is gorgeously presented, with attractive icons helping you navigate its myriad features, and it's responsive, too. Control is via the handset or free app

### SPECIFICATIONS

**HDD:** No. Fit your own 3.5in SATA – up to 8TB supported

**CONNECTIONS:** Ethernet; 3 x host mode USB; HDMI 1.4 output; composite video output; component video output; coaxial/optical digital audio; stereo analogue audio output; SD card slot; headphone

**AUDIO FORMAT SUPPORT:** MP3, WMA, AAC/M4A, APE, OGG, FLAC (up to 24-bit/192kHz), WAV, (up to 24-bit/192kHz), AIFF (up to 24-bit/192kHz), Dolby Digital/DTS (5.1 passthrough); Dolby TrueHD (passthrough) DTS-HD Master Audio (passthrough)

**VIDEO FORMAT SUPPORT:** MPEG1, MPEG 2, X.264/H.264 (inc. MP4, MKV) MVC, WMV, XviD (not all); MPEG-2 and H.264 off-air transport streams; ISO disc images; VIDEO\_TS DVD rips; GIF/JPEG/PNG/BMP still images

**DIMENSIONS:** 429(w) x 56(h) x 299(d)mm

**WEIGHT:** 2.5kg (no HDD)

**FEATURES:** Wi-Fi built in; onboard HDD caddy (hot-swappable); 3D support; playlist support (with shuffle/repeat); video upscaling; file browser; Java app support; screen saver; web browser; internet radio; (simple) games; passthrough of HD audio; 1080p24 support (plus NTSC/480i, PAL/576i and 480p/576p/720p/1080i/1080p); onboard file server, record and playback IPTV; copy between network/SD card/HDD; customisable user interface; Sigma Designs SMP8673 chipset; 512MB RAM; 256MB plus 4GB flash memory

### HCC VERDICT



#### Dune HD Base 3D

→ £250 Approx → <http://my-htpc.co.uk>  
→ Tel: 0113 322 94 96

**HIGHS:** Incredibly flexible and easy to install/use; high standard of AV performance; will handle just about anything

**LOWS:** Can't passthrough specific audio codecs; some older DivX/XviD files wouldn't play; competing platforms offer more VOD

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

# Sticking it to Google

This neat gadget joins Google's Chromecast in the clamour for an HDMI slot on your TV – and **Mark Craven** believes it's currently the better option



The Streaming Stick comes with a physical remote

**WITH GOOGLE'S CHROMECAST** garnering a lot of attention recently, Roku couldn't have got its Streaming Stick to market soon enough. HDMI-based diddly gadgets that plug straight into your telly are all the rage.

Of course, Roku would argue that it got there first – it's had the Streaming Stick around, in the US at least, for a good couple of years. However, previously it needed a Roku-ready TV or device to function (and an MHL-certified HDMI input). Now, these restrictions are lifted – this £50 media streamer works with any HDMI TV.

So what does it do? Mainly, it brings you apps. Lots of apps – many more than the sparse offerings of Google's rival in fact. These range from VOD (Netflix, Now TV, BBC iPlayer, Demand 5, Crackle, etc) and music (Spotify, Rdio) to games, weather, sports, news and more. As it mixes free and paid-for services, you have to setup an account, with card details, before you are ready to Roku. Having an account is free, though, and you can delete your details whenever you like.

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** HDMI-connected Smart TV extender

**POSITION:** Part of a four-strong lineup – the others are puck-shaped media players

**PEERS:** Google Chromecast; Now TV box

The Streaming Stick has other tricks up its sleeve. One is that it can sync to a smartphone/tablet on the same Wi-Fi network and play audio, video and photo files stored on that device on your TV. Secondly, you can add the Plex or Roku Media Player apps to enable

file-streaming from your home network. Thirdly, it will cast directly from Netflix and YouTube apps on your tablet/phone via the DIAL (Discovery And Launch) protocol.

For only £50, that's a good chunk of features, yet the Roku perhaps makes the most sense as an accessory to a non-Smart TV.

Most contemporary

flatscreens, to be fair, offer the same levels of functionality.

## Get streaming

Installation is simple, with the uncluttered Roku interface guiding you through the process. Things to note are that the Stick is obviously less flexible than an HDMI cable, so you may find it won't fit in the snugest of places. Secondly, it needs power; a USB input on its back end provides the option of either plugging into a wall, or into a USB socket on your flatscreen for a more elegant solution.

Control is achieved by the supplied handset, and it's okay, if a little slow when you want to add search terms via an onscreen keyboard. Far better to download the free Android/iOS app to do this. The actual time it takes the Roku to wake up is slightly frustrating, and apps can dawdle before appearing on screen.

1080p video is offered, with the exact quality dependant on the service in action. HD YouTube videos, and BBC iPlayer, both look suitably sharp.

The Streaming Stick's major flaw in comparison to Google's Chromecast is that it doesn't work in conjunction with your laptop, mirroring whatever is in your Chrome browser. It's more of a traditional app-based Smart extender. Also, it's £20 more expensive. On the other hand, providing an actual physical remote means you don't need your phone/tablet/laptop to use it.

Overall, it's a cast-iron bargain. Roku's purple-coated dongle has taken residency in the HDMI input of my second-room flatscreen and won't be leaving anytime soon. The media smarts it delivers are well appreciated ■

## SPECIFICATIONS

**APP SUPPORT:** Roku claims over 500 – these include Netflix, YouTube, BBC iPlayer, 4oD, Demand 5, Now TV, Crackle, Spotify, Rdio, Tune-in, Facebook

**CONNECTIONS:** HDMI; microUSB  
**DIMENSIONS:** 79(w) x 28(h) x 11(d)mm

**WEIGHT:** 18g  
**FEATURES:** Built-in Wi-Fi; media streaming with 1080p video and 5.1/7.1 surround audio support; physical remote; Roku Remote app for Android/iOS; Roku Media Player app for streaming from home network; YouTube & Netflix casting from Smart devices; photo/music/video playback from phone/tablet

## HCC VERDICT

### Roku Streaming Stick

→ £50 Approx → [www.roku.com/uk](http://www.roku.com/uk)

→ Tel: 0843 378 0172

**HIGHS:** Plenty of quality video-on-demand apps; plenty of other apps; easy installation; cast from YouTube and Netflix; affordable

**LOWS:** Can be slow to activate apps; won't mirror a laptop/phone; need to setup an account

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★



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# Saying 'Yes' to YAS

**Adrian Justins** reckons Yamaha's affordable soundbar offers an impressive audio performance to go with its classy design and build



**IT'S NOT JUST** Sony using the wedge (with its higher-end flatscreens) to good effect this year – Yamaha has adopted the same shape for its latest front virtual surround system (more commonly known as a soundbar). It's a subtle touch that will probably be lost on many of its users, but overall helps give the impression that a lot of thought has gone in to designing the YAS-103.

This £230 'bar looks classy and is made from good-quality piano gloss black plastic. A white version is also available. The driver array comprises two 2.5in mid/tweeter cones, covered by an acoustically transparent grille and each powered to the tune of 30W. The underside sports a dual-driver 60W subwoofer, joined to a bass reflex port running almost all of the length of the chassis, terminating in a duct outlet shaped like a trumpet bell to limit noise.

HDMI is absent but otherwise connectivity is good; you can choose between a stereo phono pair, two optical digital audio jacks and coaxial digital audio. Additionally, there's Bluetooth streaming, but not CD-quality aptX.

Yamaha has created an iOS and Android remote control app that uses Bluetooth rather than a network connection, and it provides a number of listening modes (music, movies, sport, etc) that aren't available when using the physical remote. The handset itself is about the size and weight of a four-fingered Kit Kat

but a lot less likely to melt. Controls include subwoofer level and engaging the YAS-103's Air Surround, Clear Voice and UniVolume features (the latter puts paid to large variations in volume during ad breaks and when changing channels). There are a smattering of

buttons on the fascia and an array of LEDs that indicate the mode and changes in volume, etc. It's all very slick and easier to operate than a bicycle pump.

When placed on a tabletop the YAS-103 towers some 11cm tall. Even if it doesn't prevent you from seeing the whole of your screen it may well block the remote control signal, so Yamaha has provided a TV Remote Repeater on the back of the bar that transmits the signal to the TV.

## Effortless effective

For its size, this is mightily impressive, pumping out a rich, clean sound from a range of sources. The Clear Voice mode is well suited to use with sports where the sound of the commentator can otherwise struggle against the sound of the crowd, and with dramas such as *24 Live Another Day*, it picks the mumble of Jack Bauer up nicely. Stick on some more complex movie soundtracks, such as *Prometheus*, and the surround mode is worth a go for the increased sonic dispersion it creates and convincing movement given to individual effects, such as the clicking 'pups' in the cave.

The sound from the bass drivers, while never likely to disperse dust from your shelves, is meaty and meshes nicely with the mid/highs. Movie explosions are given the excitement they deserve. Flip over to music streaming via Bluetooth, though, and those twin woofers may need tempering; with Gregory Porter's *Hey Laura* and Lorde's *Royals*, I found the sub reverberated on the high setting that I had decided was good for filmic fun.

Overall, though, the YAS-103 is a sumptuously-designed piece of kit, with a routinely engaging audio performance ■

## SPECIFICATIONS

**DRIVE UNITS:** 2 x 2.5in mid/high drivers; 2 x 3in bass drivers  
**AMPLIFICATION:** 120W  
**CONNECTIONS:** Stereo phono; digital coaxial; 2 x digital optical  
**DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA:** No/No  
**SEPARATE SUB:** No  
**REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes  
**DIMENSIONS:** 890(w) x 91(h) x 105(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 4kg  
**FEATURES:** Air Surround; UniVolume; Clear Voice; Dolby Digital and DTS decoding; Bluetooth audio streaming and iOS/Android app control; 50Hz to 150Hz subwoofer frequency response; 150Hz to 22kHz front speaker frequency response; learning remote; TV remote repeater function; Audio Delay Control (Lip Sync)



## HCC VERDICT

### Yamaha YAS-103

→ £230 Approx → [www.uk.yamaha.com](http://www.uk.yamaha.com)  
 → Tel: 0844 811 1116  
**HIGHS:** Cool design; three digital inputs; easy to use; good, consistent sound; nice app  
**LOWS:** Bluetooth audio streaming not aptX; no HDMI connection

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** Bluetooth-streaming soundbar

**POSITION:** Above the YAS-93, below Yamaha's YSP range

**PEERS:** Orbitsound SB60LX; JBL SB200; Sony HT-CT260



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# Planar magnetic magic to your ears

Oppo pulls out all the stops with its premium PM-1 headphones. **Steve May** wants a bank loan

**OPPO WILL BE** best known to *HCC* readers as the long-standing champion of high-end universal Blu-ray players, but now the brand has spread its wings into the roiling headphone market with the PM-1s. Of course, these are not just any old cans, but high-performance ear-warmers that utilise audiophile planar magnetic technology.

Everything about the PM-1s is premium. They ship in a gloriously lacquered wooden box and come with optional velour covers should the oh-so-soft and supple lamb-leather cups not be to your liking. There's also a posh denim carry case and two detachable cables: a copper cable wrapped in black fabric and terminated with a 6.35mm (1/4in) jack plug for AVR use; and a shorter 3.5mm lead.

Although large, the PM-1s are relatively light at just 395 grams, and the padded headband and overall balance is extremely comfortable. While these cans are sensitive enough (at a claimed 102dB) to be used with smartphones



and mobile media players, they're not best suited to commuting; the over-ear open back design lets in too much ambient noise. They're best considered domestic headphones.

Build quality is exceptional, and attention to detail is high. The planar magnetic drive units employ a 7-layer diaphragm, comprising a spiralling pattern of flat conductors etched on both sides (hence the sensitivity). The tech lends itself to pristine articulation and wide spatial imaging, teasing out details and separation from stereo music. And although

Oppo has gone for the high-end jugular with its debut headphones

sweetly crisp they don't lack for bass; close-quarter pressure loading adds a visceral but well-balanced kick that's ripe for action movies. Another benefit of the design is extremely low distortion – the PM-1s offer a relaxed, smooth listen that's a perpetual treat for your lugholes.

Undoubtedly pricey, but with the level of performance that you'd expect ■

## HCC VERDICT

Oppo PM-1 → £1,100

Overall ★★★★★

TOSHIBA 32D3453DB → Approx £340

# Tosh continues the combined approach

**John Archer** wonders if he has room in his life – and house – for a 32in TV with built-in DVD deck

**DVD HAS BEEN** soldiering on for more than a decade, and with disc sales only starting to really falter in the face of Blu-ray it would seem to have a lot of fans. Toshiba's 32D3453DB – a 32in LCD TV with a slot-loading DVD drive – marries the elderly tech with some more

modern features, notably Freeview HD and Smart TV.

With the latter, built-in Wi-Fi or Ethernet hookup ushers in an average selection of apps and DLNA streaming. Furthermore, picture adjustment menus include a colour management system.

On the other hand, the set's native resolution is 1,366 x 768. It's all a bit mixed up.

Pictures are watchable, but not superb. Off-axis viewing is problematic as the Toshiba's contrast and colour fidelity drops off considerably. Stay face-on, though, and you're rewarded with a solid black

level and well-judged tones. The edge LED backlight system is nuanced enough to rummage up some confident shadow detail, but clouding is noticeable, particularly at the screen's upper edge.

Standard-def movies played from the built-in DVD spinner are upscaled nicely, and when fed HD sources the limits of the TV's resolution don't stop things looking sharp.

Audio quality is marred by a bass-drought, but is wholly adequate considering where the Toshiba is likely to be located. Overall, this is a decent budget option, even if playing DVDs these days feels antiquated ■



This set offers an HD Ready 1,366 x 768 resolution

## HCC VERDICT

Toshiba 32D3453DB → £340

Overall ★★★★★



# Master of the dark arts

£600 isn't cheap for a 42in TV these days, but **John Archer** finds that Sony's sleek W7 series could be worthy of the outlay, courtesy of some brilliant black level skills

**SONY IS REALLY** getting a feel for how to dress mid-range TVs. This £600 42-incher looks peachy with its slim aluminium bezel, ultra-trim rear and glinting, minimalistic 'hairline' metal stand. It's a bit plasticky if you get too close, but this is easily rectified by, um, not getting too close.

The 42W705B is an edge LED set (unlike the W6 series below it, which uses a chunkier direct LED design), with a Full HD resolution and Sony's Motionflow processing. There's no 3D support, but that's fair enough for the asking price. In terms of Smart features, it offers Ethernet/integrated Wi-Fi options for either streaming media from DLNA PCs or accessing content on Sony's SEN online portal, which includes apps for Netflix, Amazon Instant, BBC iPlayer and Demand 5, but cocks a snoot at ITV Player and 4OD. Finding stuff to watch is aided by the Discover function, which throws up suggested content on a scrolling bar at the bottom of the screen.

The TV carries a fair set of picture tweaks, but you don't get a full CMS. I suspect most buyers of this mid-range model will stick with the well-considered picture presets.

Feeling mean, I used the sporadically brilliant but inevitably often very dark *30 Days of Night* as test material. The 42W705B rose to the film's contrast challenge extremely well, especially when it comes to the all-important

matter of black level response. The creepy, ultra-dark shots preceding the vampires' first attack were made to look immersive and full of subtle scary details; the 42W705B packs an ability to render black colours with a richness and depth that's not always on offer on mid-range models. The lack of



any grey misting, backlight clouding or 'jumping' means there's nothing to distract you from the scares and low-lit gore.

## Bright pupil

It also excels with colour, offering high levels of vibrancy and outstanding tonal range. Obviously this helps bright interiors really pop, like those in the sheriff's office, but it's equally noticeable with subtler, darker moments, like the memorable tracking shot down the high street as the blood of many of the town's residents soaks into the snow. This low-brightness colour prowess and deft handling of shadow detail reveals that the 42W705B's contrast strengths come natively from its core panel, rather than being created by removing excessive quantities of backlight during dark scenes. This makes the 42W705B a handy option for a bright environment like a conservatory or kitchen.

Motion is clean and relatively judder-free too, and the mostly good pictures are joined by a surprisingly well-rounded and clear audio effort that belies the TV's super-skinny frame.

Contrast and colour drop off if you view from much of an angle, but this affects most LCD TVs, to be honest. Also, despite the impressive colour and motion resolution, Full HD images didn't appear quite as crisp as I've seen them elsewhere. Yet neither of these minor flaws are enough to convince me that the 42W705B isn't worthy of an audition ■

## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** No. You'll need to step up to the W8 series

**ULTRA HD:** No. 1,920 x 1,080

**TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD

**CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI; 2 x USB; Ethernet; component video input; composite video input; Scart; PCMCIA slot; headphone; optical digital audio; analogue audio

**SOUND:** 16W

**BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A

**CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** 'Over 1 million:1'

**DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 563(h) x 958(w) x 64(d)mm

**WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 10.5kg

**FEATURES:** Built-in Wi-Fi; Motionflow XR200; dynamic contrast system; X-Reality Pro processing; Advanced Contrast Enhancer; numerous picture presets; 24p True Cinema; Skype ready; Screen Mirroring; TV Side View; DLNA/USB file playback; USB HDD recording

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** 42in Edge LED, Full HD TV

**POSITION:** In the upper-mid section of Sony's HD range for 2014

**PEERS:** Panasonic L42ET60; Samsung UE40H6400

## HCC VERDICT

**Sony KDL-42W705B**

→ £600 Approx → [www.sony.co.uk](http://www.sony.co.uk)

→ Tel: 020 7365 2413

**HIGHS:** Picture quality; good design; strong value; decent online service

**LOWS:** Limited effective viewing angle; HD could look sharper; SEN lacks ITV Player and 4OD

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★

# Wireless hero with hidden talents

Sony's SRS-X9 brings high-res audio to the Bluetooth battleground, says **Steve May**

**THE GLINTING GOLD** rings around the super tweeters on Sony's SRS-X9 wireless speaker signal that this isn't just any old Bluetooth barker, but part of the brand's high-falutin' Hi Res Audio initiative. A removable metallic grille conceals two 19mm super tweeters, twin 50mm magnetic fluid midrange drivers and a 94mm subwoofer flanked by dual passive radiators. Two additional super-tweeters sit topside. 150W of amplification is spread across the front speakers, with a supplementary 2x2W directed to the top pair.

Connections run to USB A and B ports, 3.5mm minijack and Ethernet. The latter is for setup purposes if you don't want to use Sony's SongPal app. Wi-Fi is built-in, and both AirPlay and Bluetooth (with aptX) are supported.

Although fairly compact (just 430mm wide), the SRS-X9 has enormous presence when fired up, with sensational high-end



clarity and solid, deep bass. Fed 24-bit/96kHz FLAC files, it sounds superb with whatever musical genres you throw at it. By default, the SRS-X9 also functions as an unfeasibly great sound system when watching video on a smartphone or tablet.

Even bigger gains can be had when you hardwire a source via the stereo minijack. I connected an Oppo BD player via a Musical Fidelity V90 DAC, taking the analogue output

The SRS-X9 is part of Sony's Hi-Res Audio stable

direct. The resulting scale and clarity was immense; those extra tweeters really add space to the acoustic. DSD64 files are particularly articulate. Similarly, the SRS-X9 can also double as a high-end soundbar, although it's a shame it doesn't come with a digital optical input.

Overall, the SRS-X9 may be high priced, but it's nothing short of a sensational performer. Maybe there is something to Sony's Hi-Res Audio plans after all... ■

**HCC VERDICT**

Sony SRS-X9 → £600

Overall ★★★★★

WD MY PASSPORT AV-TV → Approx £85

# A passport for telly addicts

**Adrian Justins** auditions a high-speed hard drive that's a perfect fit for a Smart TV

**THE MY PASSPORT** AV-TV from multimedia maestro WD is a hard drive specially made for PVR duties. It's compatible with most makes of TV (the company lists support for LG, Panasonic, Sony, Samsung, Sharp and Toshiba) and features a 110MB/s USB 3.0 socket (also compatible with USB 2.0) that can handle multiple HD streams at the same time. It's also pretty compact, measuring around 12cm long and weighing 185g in its larger £85 1TB capacity (it also comes as a slightly smaller 500GB version for £70).

There are rubber feet for horizontal placement on your AV shelf but it can be fixed to most TV rear panels in a storage bracket, although to do so is arguably a shame as it's quite a looker, as hard drives go.

The 1TB model will gobble up 500 hours of standard-def or 250 hours of HD material (or somewhere in between for a mixture). Like any other external USB hard drive, the My Passport AV-TV requires formatting prior to use, which means that all current data (if any) on the drive will be deleted. Most TVs should recognise when there is a USB hard drive connected to them and will prompt you to format it automatically.



The hallmark of a good hard drive is that when in use it performs its duties without drawing any attention to itself. Using the My Passport AV-TV with a Samsung UE55HU8500 it did just that, formatting quickly and working perfectly. It recorded countless shows without fault and allowed me to view them with ease, remaining totally stable. I was able to wind through recordings in either direction at an unspecified yet startlingly fast speed, and found no issues with watching a finished recording whilst making another. All in all, a reliable, solid piece of kit that can turn a bedroom Smart TV into a nifty recorder ■

**HCC VERDICT**

WD My Passport AV-TV → £85

Overall ★★★★★

The USB socket supports 2.0/3.0 standard





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# DIGITAL COPY

**Mark Craven** has spent years amassing a DVD collection. But now he rarely watches anything at less than 1080p and is wondering what he should do with it

**FOR MANY PEOPLE**, Bank Holiday weekends are an opportunity to get the lawnmower out and spend a few hours pretending they're Monty Don. Not me, though: I spent the first Monday in May staring at my DVD collection, considering whether it was time to take the whole lot to the tip. Because, frankly, that's pretty much all it's good for in 2014, isn't it?

I wasn't the earliest adopter of DVD – I was still plugging away with VHS in the late 1990s – but when I made the switch from chunky tape to silver disc I wasted no time in filling up my bookcases with sci-fi flicks, TV comedies, crime dramas and whatever else was in the £3-for-£20 offer at HMV that month. And soon my shelves were groaning under the weight of my DVD addiction. Some remained in their shrink-wrapped protection, of course, as they were titles I bought that I'd previously owned on VHS and had no intention of watching again for a good while yet.

Even now some of them are still unwatched – and are never likely to be. For instance, **I cannot ever envisage a situation where I will want to sit through the 1998 Adam Sandler comedy *The Waterboy*** at 576p so badly that I will scour my DVD hoard and free it from its cellophane prison. It's probably available on Sky-on-demand anyway...

## Dazzling dross

This is the problem, actually. Much of my DVD collection is dross (the *Bedazzled* remake, anyone?) and much of it is available on any number of the video-on-demand services I have access to. I've written often that I'm a fan of the physical disc, and love the sheer act of collecting, but it comes to a point where it begins to feel a little bit nuts.

The solution is to prune my DVD collection, upgrading the titles I actually really will watch again to Blu-ray. I've already done this to some extent. Films that I would probably rank in my all-time Top 20, including *Jaws*, *Southern Comfort* and *Alien*, all sit snugly in the BD rack, alongside modern faves, such as *Crank* and *Prometheus*, that were bought originally on Blu-ray anyway. But where do you draw the line? Replacing DVDs with BD versions isn't cheap, so whether or not I should upcycle my every-single-Denzel-Washington-movie-section is a decision that I won't be taking lightly.

So, start with the dross. I have oodles of movies, all roughly circa 1995-2005, that can be sold, right? Wrong. Worryingly (and probably because of those pesky VOD services I mentioned earlier) much of my DVD collection is practically worthless.

Take *The Waterboy* (actually, please do). Despite being Adam Sandler's second-best sports comedy (behind *Happy Gilmore*, obviously) it's hardly a sought-after title. A look at eBay reveals that someone tried and failed to sell a DVD copy for 49p, plus £1.24 postage. And those 'we buy anything' companies advertised on TV are worse, offering just 30p. Now I'm not made of money, but I'm not sure I can be bothered to spend a good couple of hours sorting through my DVDs, checking the discs are actually in their cases and entering their barcodes online, just to recoup enough to buy the inevitable *Hobbit Trilogy* box set on BD next Christmas.

No, the simplest thing to do is to donate them to a charity shop. And once that's done, I'll be making a serious effort to rein in my BD-buying habits, because I don't want to be doing this all over again in five years when 1080p is so passé ■

*Do you hoard DVDs, or have you replaced them all with BDs? Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)*

**Mark Craven** won't be getting rid of all his DVDs, because he can't imagine the complete series of *Dogtanian* getting a BD release in the future





# FILM FANATIC

A recent dip into the Sunday newspapers leaves **Anton van Beek** wondering why some people still get so caught up with the notion of 'genre'...

**FLICKING THROUGH ONE** of the Sunday broadsheets recently I came across a piece by the paper's TV critic, taking a pop at HBO's fantasy show *Game of Thrones*. With my own opinion being so far opposed to that of the writer, I was actually rather intrigued by the prospect of reading what I assumed would be a thoughtful and intelligent critique of the hit show. How wrong I was.

Amazingly, my biggest problem with the piece wasn't the writer's admission that they had difficulty figuring out what was going on due to never having watched any of the show's previous three seasons ('because I have a life'). Rather, it was the overall tone of the column, which clearly set out to denigrate and belittle the fantasy genre as something utterly worthless and infantile.

Regardless of the fact that we're talking about a paid writer for a so-called 'highbrow' newspaper, I'm always gobsmacked whenever anybody dismisses an entire genre as worthless. Surely **every single creative endeavour should be judged solely on its own individual merits, not by how it fits into a series of pigeon-holes** whose main purpose is to aid marketing teams in selling their products.

So let's look at *Game of Thrones* for a second. The presence of dragons, magic and a fantastical setting clearly marks it out as belonging to the fantasy genre from an aesthetic point of view. But it's hardly the *Dungeons & Dragons* cartoon, is it? Actually watching the series reveals the fantasy to be mere dressing for an epic tale of political intrigue and family feuds. As such, in terms of actual thematic and narrative concerns, *Game of Thrones* has much more in common with the likes of *I, Claudius* and *House of Cards* than *The Lord of the Rings*.

So, going back to the newspaper writer who prompted this (and any others who instantly dismiss the fantasy genre), are we to believe that the themes that *Game of Thrones* deals with are rendered completely pointless if they involve people standing around outside castles in a mythical world, but not when the exact same issues are dealt with by people in togas standing around a recreation of Ancient Rome?

Similarly, do those people who dismiss the horror genre out of hand also hate the acclaimed 1991 critical and commercial smash *The Silence of the Lambs*? As you can see from our *Franchise* feature on p90, that police procedural has all the aesthetic tropes necessary to place it squarely within the boundaries of the horror genre.

And don't even get me started on *Jaws*.

## Playing make-believe

Ultimately it doesn't matter whether a story is told by actors playing real or fictional. It's all about playing make-believe. Sure, some films and TV shows may be based on real events, but even then they've been twisted and reshaped to suit the medium and the whims of the producers.

By dismissing entire genres out of hand the only thing you do is rob yourself of fantastic experiences. Ignore the musical and you'll never have the chance to bathe in the wit and brilliance of *Singin' in the Rain*. Dismiss the rom-com and you miss out on the wickedly funny *Harold and Maude*. And turn your nose up at sci-fi and you'll never witness Max Rebo playing keyboard in Jabba The Hut's palace...

So do yourself a favour and ditch the blinkers, before I set my dragon on you ■

Are there any genres that you simply can't abide?  
Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)

**Anton van Beek** once considered arranging all of his DVDs by genre, until he realised how many extra copies of *The Princess Bride* he would have to buy





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# Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current technology?  
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## Split AV gives me a headache

I read with interest your thoughts on the Oppo BDP-105D in *HCC* #233, having just bought one myself. I was interested to have you explain your findings on the Dual HDMI functionality but you did not go into that much detail.

I express interest in this as I am struggling to get my player to operate the way I want it to in this respect and in the way I feel it should be doing.

I have it connected from its HDMI 1 output to my Sony KD-55X9005A and HDMI 2 goes to my Pioneer VSX-923 AV receiver. The HDMI output from my Pioneer goes to HDMI 2 on the Sony.

When connected like this, though, and selecting HDMI 1 on



the Sony and BD on the Pioneer, I am getting intermittent picture and the Pioneer loses lock on the HDMI signal (its little red LED going out). This happens every 10-15 seconds (approximately) and makes it all unwatchable. I have been in contact with Oppo and Pioneer who both have been

very helpful but have been unable to solve the problem.

Oppo suggested removing the HDMI connection between the Pioneer and the Sony. This does actually cure the 'fault' but my question then to Oppo was how am I supposed to watch Sky HD and use my Xbox, which are

**Oppo's BDP-105D can split an HDMI signal over its two outputs**

plugged into the Pioneer via HDMI? At this point they have run out of ideas.

All my leads are the correct specification. I have turned off all CEC functions on all three units,

## ★ STAR LETTER...

## Get rocking in HD with Neil Diamond and Roy Orbison!

In the recent comic (*HCC* #233) you asked for suggestions of favourite music concert discs.

If you are fans of the great Neil Diamond then I recommend you have a listen to *the* definitive Diamond live concert recording called *Hot August Night NYC*. It was recorded at Madison Square Gardens in New York, and was a concert format he took on tour around the world, including here in the UK, in 2008.

In it there were some numbers included from his original 1972 concert at the Greek Theatre, Los Angeles, which itself was never released in video format, only as an LP and then CD recording, but which was by his own admission his greatest ever recording success. That particular recording was re-released on CD last year as a commemorative 40th

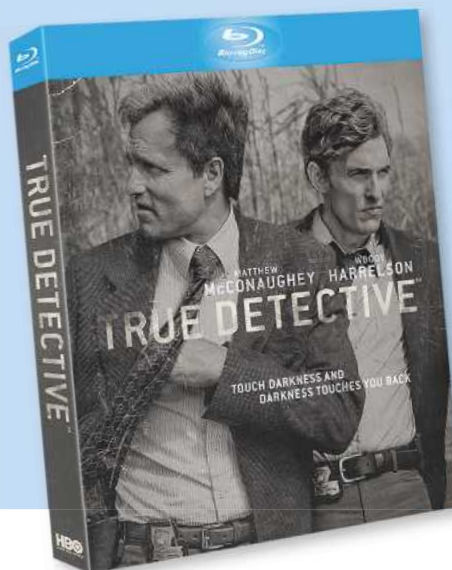
anniversary issue and included some numbers not present in the original release versions. But back to this Blu-ray: it is quite simply stunning, superb music, well edited and, as always with Mr Diamond's efforts, two hours of seamless, non-stop entertainment, backed up as always by his incredible 14-piece band.

My next suggestion is by the great 'Big O', Roy Orbison – a fantastic music concert of just over an hour called *Black and White Night*. It is, as the title suggests, recorded in black-and-white which enhances a smokey nightclub-style ambience. On stage are five of the (then) world's top guitarists, messers Bruce Springsteen, Elvis Costello,

J.D Souther, T-Bone Burnett and Orbison himself. These fantastic guitarists are accompanied on stage by the three 'gorgeous gals' – Kathryn Dawn Lang, Bonnie Raitt and Jennifer Warnes. Tom

Waits and Jackson Browne hang about on stage, not really contributing much to this magnificent line-up, but otherwise filling in space and helping create musical ambience. It is a wonderful exhibition of co-ordinated guitar playing as well as a demonstration of Orbison's vocal ranges and his best songs. Apparently, they had had little time to rehearse prior to the night and more or less co-ordinated themselves as they went along, demonstrating what great musicians they are.

This concert was originally issued in standard-def DVD, but I obtained a copy on the now-defunct HD DVD format (which incidentally I have always maintained was better than Blu-ray and was







**Gravity:**  
clamouring to be in  
our Top 101 BDs

as Oppo did suggest this. I have made sure the Pioneer is set to 'amp' and not to 'through' but still I get the problem.

I can 'daisy chain' the units and all works well and I can re-connect the HDMI from the Pioneer to my Sony TV and all is still okay. However, the Oppo offers the functionality of split AV via the two HDMI's and so I feel to get the best out of my system I should do this.

I cannot believe I am the only person with an Oppo Blu-ray and a Pioneer AVR who wants to connect it this way but cannot find anything on the internet about this specific problem!

Any thoughts?

*Michael Dyer, via email*

**Richard Stevenson replies:**

There are a couple of Team HCC members with Oppo BD players (myself included) but we are unable to recreate the issues you have with the dual output. Of the potential causes, the most likely is to be centered on the HDMI EDID handshaking procedure.

The Extended Display Identification Data system on HDMI was designed primarily as a copy-protection measure to ensure that digital piracy over HDMI was pretty darn tricky. When you hook up two components with an HDMI lead, before they can transmit any content between the source and display (AKA 'sink'), the HDMI interface modules in each component send Extended Display Interface Data to each other. Once both components 'know' what their new partner is, the HDMI interface allows transmission of the correct signals in the correct resolution to suite both devices.

This handshaking procedure is complex, allowing you to send Blu-ray content to a TV but blocking it from being sent to

a BD recorder or hard disk drive for copying.

So far so good. Problems generally arise if a source sees multiple sinks, such as BD to amp to TV with simultaneous BD to TV from the player's second output. In theory all of the components in your system should handshake, calculate how you have connected things together, and work as prescribed.

My Oppo player connects to my JVC projector both directly and through my Denon AV processor and works fine. I have a horrible feeling that your issue may be a bug that is specific to the exact mix of components you have in the system. Pinpointing which unit is at fault is tricky.

So, like the manufacturers, we are somewhat stumped by your problem. Our advice would be to seek help from your local AV retailer, who will hopefully have a lot of experience in these matters. Worst case scenario is that one component in your system may have to be changed or upgraded to get the system to work as described. Alternatively, ignore the Oppo's dual output feature and simply let its AV signal go through the AVR over a single HDMI cable – personally I would suggest the performance difference is barely discernible.

#### Top 101 needs to be 102!

I enjoyed the Top 101 Blu-rays feature from a few issues ago, but

am wondering if you should have waited for the *Gravity* Blu-ray release before deciding your list. As your own review makes clear (and I agree completely), this is a stunning Blu-ray, with great sound and awesome (3D) pictures. Surely it would definitely have made your Top 101? It's already in my Top 10.

*Jose, via email*

Anton van Beek replies: Oh, totally. Not only does *Gravity* have the advantage of being a cracking little movie (only 91 minutes long, whereas a lot of Hollywood films these days seem to go for ages) but the Blu-ray is fantastic. It is, as you say, an awesome 3D experience, and the 360-degree sound design is possibly the best I've ever heard. But the title came in for review too late to make our Top 101 feature. If we're doing it again, it would most likely take up orbit in the Top 20.

#### Silly Sonos

Hi. I am having a bit of a rant and it is possible that some of your readers may have similar issues with Sonos, after it has changed the functionality of the Mute button on its speakers. I have just sent the following to their CEO:

'According to your website you would love to hear from me ("Feel free to email our CEO directly – he'd love to hear from you..."). Well I wonder if such a contact

certainly better prepared for market at its released inception). I still have a collection of discs and a player in my system and this concert is one of my favourites. It has become available on BD since.

These two titles are just a small part of my music concert collection but rank right at the top of the heap for me!

*Ivor Phillips, via email*

**Mark Craven replies:** Thanks for sharing Ivor. We'll add these to our wishlist. Who else wants to suggest some live concert discs we should check out?

Star letter-writer Ivor wins a copy of the *True Detective: Season One* Blu-ray, which is available to buy on June 9 from HBO Home Entertainment.

might lead to some positive action for me, as it does not appear to have worked for others. I refer to your misguided, not required and not requested product change to the Mute button.

I have a ten-zone system, built up over many years, which your recent change has ruined. The system did what it said it would do when I bought it and was a pleasure to use. In fact I and the rest of the family have been so pleased that we have not hesitated to recommend it to others, even to the extent of helping a friend by putting in a five-zone system.

But no more. The way this change has been imposed and the way we (the customers) have been dealt with on the Sonos Community website has left me feeling let down and that Sonos does not care. I will no longer recommend your product and if asked will not only say why but suggest they consider alternatives. As for my system, I have spent too much on it to



just dump it, but I will not be adding to it.

If you really want to hear from your customers I suggest you, not just staff, read the comments and constructive suggestions made on the Community site, then take action to give us back our purchased product. Don't keep telling me how to press some other buttons in a special way. We could also just pull the power! *Cliff Tomkins, Sussex*

**Mark Craven replies:** Well, Cliff, we've printed your 'rant' and have paid a visit to the Sonos Community site ourself to get

up-to-speed on the situation that's clearly got you annoyed!

For those who don't know, last year Sonos introduced functionality changes to the Mute button on its Play speakers. It now serves the purpose of pausing and playing content, or skipping tracks, and muting is now achieved by a long press on the volume down button. The mute button no longer does what it says on the tin.

We'll hold our hands up and admit that when we reviewed the new Play:1 speaker late last year we said the new functionality was 'a welcome

**Sonos is the king of multizone audio, but its fans aren't always happy...**

addition', but as is obvious from the Sonos Community site it has its drawbacks. Complaints range from having to explain to household members that the mute button doesn't do what it's meant to, to the entire system being paused when someone only meant to mute one speaker, and not being able to easily return to the previous volume level after conducting the new mute procedure.

The online discussion you directed us to has been running >

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### Ninja: Shadow of a Tear

British martial arts superstar Scott Adkins gets to cut loose and kick ass in this explosive new action film from Lionsgate UK. *Ninja: Shadow of a Tear* is available to buy now on

DVD and Blu-ray, and we've got five copies of the hi-def version up for grabs...

#### Question:

Back in 2003 Scott Adkins appeared in six episodes of which popular TV series?

#### Answer:

- A) State of Play B) EastEnders  
C) Peep Show**

Email your answer with '*Shadow of a Tear*' as the subject heading – and include your postal address!



### Orange is the New Black: Season One

The first season of the hit Netflix series about life in a women's prison recently landed on DVD and Blu-ray. And best of all, to mark the release,

Lionsgate UK has given us three copies of the Blu-ray boxset to dish out...

#### Question:

What is the name of the famous prison located in San Francisco Bay?

#### Answer:

- A) HM Prison Holloway B) Rikers Island  
C) Alcatraz**

Email your answer with '*Orange is the New Black*' as the subject heading – and include your postal address!



### Re-Animator

Second Sight gives Stuart Gordon's classic 1985 splatter flick the deluxe treatment on June 2 with a double-disc Blu-ray steelbook packed with extras and boasting two

fully restored versions of the film. To celebrate, we have five copies to give away...

#### Question:

Stuart Gordon also directed which of the following H.P. Lovecraft adaptations?

#### Answer:

- A) The Dunwich Horror B) From Beyond  
C) The Unnamable**

Email your answer with '*Re-Animator*' as the subject heading – and include your postal address!

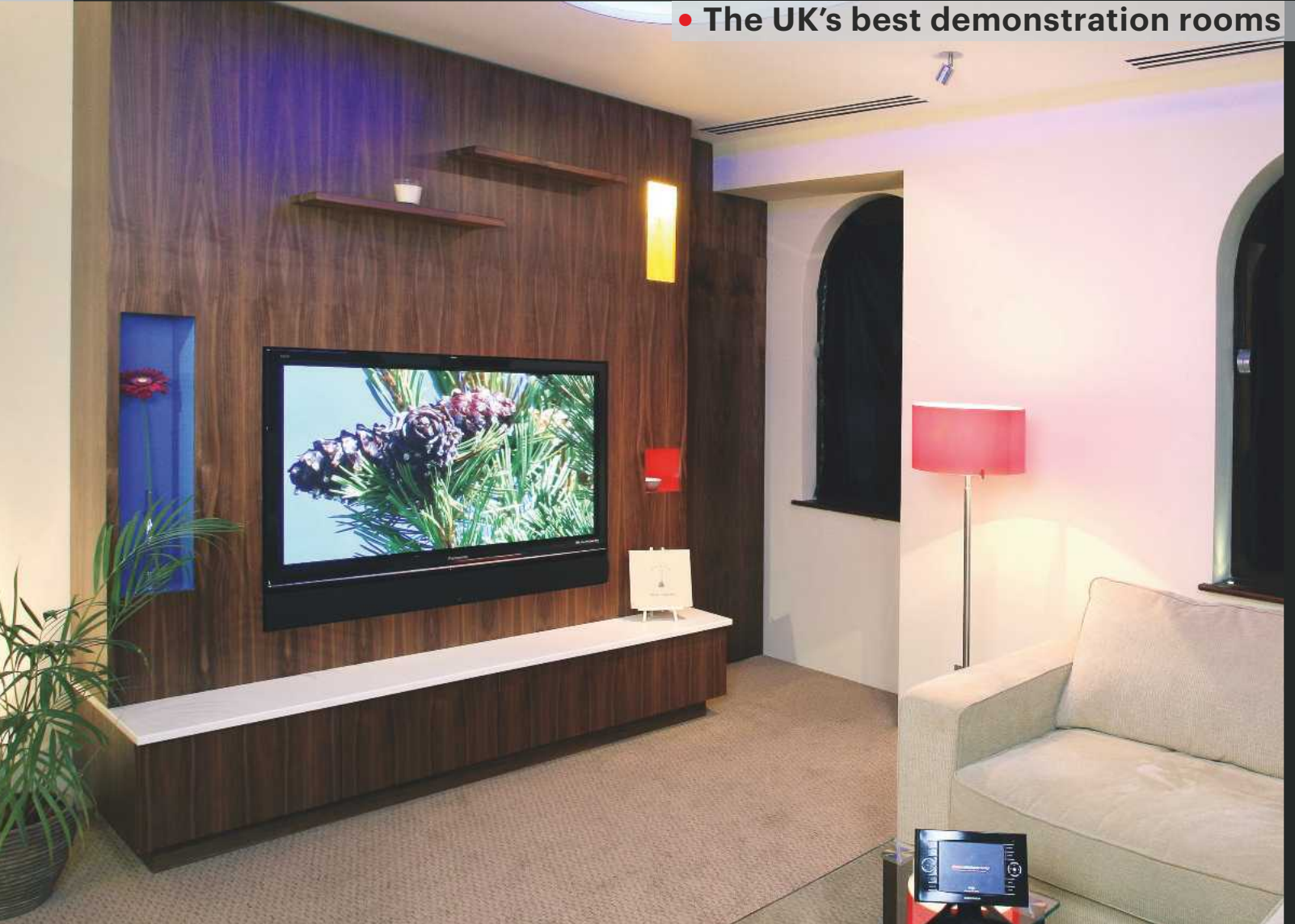
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for over six months, and a recent entry from Sonos apologised for its communication not being 'up to standard.' It says it is looking at ways to address the issue but will not be reverting to previous functionality.

This just goes to show that companies always face a tough challenge when making changes to very popular products!

### I'm a format fanatic!

There seems to be a lot of debate around at the moment concerning movie downloads, and 4K, and Blu-ray, and I wanted to add my opinion, for what it's worth.

I go out to the cinema at least once a month, often more than that, to see movies in the best AV quality I can (at my local Cineworld, which is very good). I also buy one or two Blu-rays every month, often films I've enjoyed at the cinema, and if not classic/older movies that I know I love and deserve to be seen on the best format possible.

However, I also have a Sky HD subscription, and occasionally watch movies on one of its many HD channels, as there's a great selection of old and quite new titles. On top of this I recently setup a Netflix account to enjoy, mainly, the TV shows on offer.

My point being that I am a regular, ordinary consumer. Surely there are plenty of other people



Netflix's *Orange is the New Black*: available in 4K later this year

like me? Therefore the idea that online movie downloads are going to kill other formats seems wrong. Lots of people enjoy lots of formats at the same time.

The idea that movie downloads are going to 'kill' Blu-ray particularly doesn't make sense, in the same way that Sky movies didn't 'kill' DVD and that home formats haven't 'killed' cinemas.

If you ask me, downloads and discs (and cinemas and satellite services) can and will continue to live together for a good while yet.

*Steve Milburn, via email*

### Keep on collecting

I'm on the same level as Mike Powell (Star Letter, HCC #233). Blu-ray, DVD, CD, vinyl... these will always have appeal to those who like to build a collection and 'own' what they have spent their hard-earned pennies on. Music and film downloads aren't for everyone, despite the marketing push from the companies telling us they are the 'next big thing'.

I've got a large collection of movies, and it includes Blu-ray, DVD, HD DVD and even some LaserDiscs and VHS tapes. They all sit on shelves in my living room,

**KEF's C series: Floorstanders you can sneak into a living room...**

and not on a hard drive in my computer.

*Anthony Pickering, Manchester*

**Mark Craven replies:** Thanks Steven and Anthony. I've said before that the physical vs digital debate is going to run and run, and it certainly seems that way. And I particularly share the view that most people consume movies on multiple platforms – I'm yet to meet anyone who has decided to, say, ditch disc totally in favour of downloads, or someone with a disc collection who hasn't experimented with video-on-demand.

However, it does seem at the moment that downloads are stealing a march on discs where 4K is concerned. Owners of 4K TVs can enjoy 4K content (albeit a very small amount) while Blu-ray fans are left twiddling their thumbs. And with no announcement about 4K Blu-ray seemingly on the immediate horizon, I'm interested to see how quickly 4K streaming can evolve in the meantime.

### It's good enough for me

Richard Stevenson says the best home cinema is what you can get away with without upsetting 'the 'apple cart' [Point of View, HCC #234]. Exactly! I have a good cinema setup in our living room, including 55in Panasonic plasma,

Onkyo AV receiver and KEF C Series speakers, but there's no way I could persuade my other half that we need a projector screen or bigger speakers. And I've had to make some compromises, particularly regarding the placement of the KEFs and the TV itself, which faces out from a corner rather than being hung on a wall.

Okay, it might not be the 'ideal' system, but it suits me perfectly. Watching *Pacific Rim* or *The Hobbit* on Blu-ray gives me all I want – big, hi-def picture and loud, effective surround sound, and the KEFs are great for listening to music, too.

*Chris Smith, via email*

**Richard Stevenson replies:** Glad to hear it, but are you sure you couldn't squeeze a projector and screen in there? Fit a drop-down model to your ceiling and the rest of your household could be none the wiser until movie night... ■



### CONTACT US...

Write to HCC, AV Tech Media Ltd, Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green, Orpington, BR6 6BG, or email us at [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)

**Please note:** we cannot guarantee to print/answer all the letters we receive. Sorry.



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# 'Detail is incredible'

HCC reader [Ian Lindenstruth](#) reveals why he's so glad he upgraded his mid-range Epson projector for one of its top-tier models – and guides us through the rest of his setup



Ian's Epson PJ is mounted out of sight on a high shelf at the rear of his living room, flanked by his Tannoy Arena satellite speakers



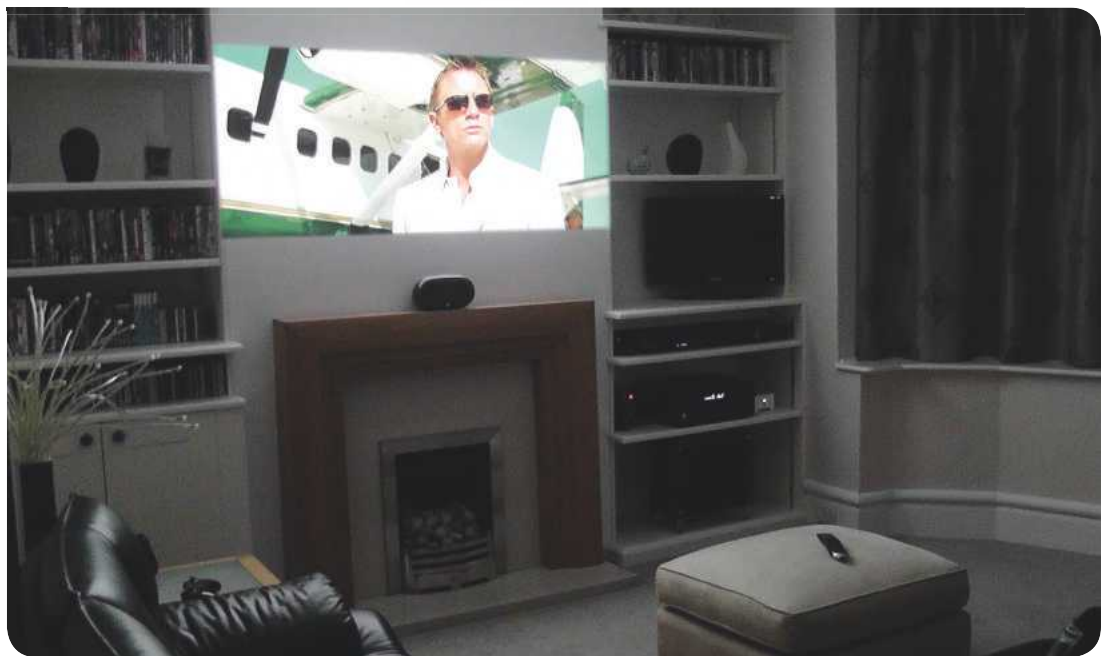
**OUR CINEMA ROOM** is a second lounge, with large comfortable sofas and a reasonably discreet AV installation. However, don't be fooled; at the touch of a button it springs into life with bigscreen surround sound action!

The centre piece is an Epson EH-TW8100 projector. It's unobtrusively located on a high rear shelf with the surround speakers, but once fired up it certainly makes its presence known.

The level of detail this projector digs up is incredible. It replaced an EH-TW3500 which seemed great (until it developed a fault), but even my girlfriend (absolutely not into AV), said 'that's much better than the last one.' When asked why, she said: 'It's just obvious.'

I have to agree. The subtlety it reveals is breathtaking, making everything seem more real, and it never gets caught out with darker areas, giving masses of shadow detail even when simultaneously displaying very bright objects. No doubt aided by its inky blacks, the contrast produced without bleaching bright detail is phenomenal, adding more three-dimensionality to images. Motion is fluid (even without enabling the frame interpolation feature), and colours are vivid, well contained, and natural, making for a very cinematic and lifelike presentation. In a darkened room, Blu-ray and HD TV pictures can literally seem almost real.

Spinning *Casino Royale*, motion in the action scenes is much more fluid than the EH-TW3500 and all the minute details are made obvious. In the rebel camp, I see things I've never noticed before: intricacies of a bulb filament, subtle reflections on the pinball machine, light glancing off car seats. In scenes



like M's apartment or the hotel security room, colours seem richer and more nuanced. The result is an image that's got more ambience, realism, and cinematic impact than I've seen before, even at some commercial cinemas.

I don't feel I could ask any more from a projector in terms of image quality, and that includes 3D (as a bonus the Epson is Full HD 3D RF compatible and works fine with £15 Samsung Active glasses). It even blasts out enough light and contrast for quality daylight viewing, plus it's very quiet, has lens shift for easy installation and provides a 10-slot custom picture memory.

For aesthetic reasons, the room doesn't use a projector screen – a good-quality white paint is employed instead



Ian says his Epson EH-TW8100 offers a noticeable improvement over his previous Epson EH-TW3500 – and his girlfriend agrees





The seven-channel Denon AVR-1911 launched in 2010 and was the brand's first AVR to offer 3D support

A Sonos Connect delivers music from a range of sources to the multichannel system



Sources, including a Samsung BD deck and Humax PVR, are tucked neatly away in an AV unit – there's even space for the subwoofer as well



The cute design of Tannoy's Arena sub/sat speaker package gets the thumbs up from Ian

More amazing, the stunning picture is delivered via my painted wall, a decision made for room aesthetics. I was prepared for a reduction in performance but I can definitely say that using Farrow and Ball's All White, it's better than the £100 screens I've tried before, with noticeably better colour containment and detail. A 73in image, minimal cost and totally unobtrusive when not in use – it's a winner!

### Rounding out the cinema setup

Obviously the image is nothing without sound and my Denon AVR-1911 receiver and Tannoy Arena speakers combine to deliver effortless detail, and great steering of effects, with excellent front to rear integration. The solidity and control of the bass seem a cut above other systems I've heard and low frequencies have proper impact – you can really feel the bass pulse when Keira Knightley's cursed coin hits the sea in *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

Quiet scenes have great nuance, action scenes explode around the room, background music soars and the atmosphere of busy sequences is fully captured. But throughout, even in heavy action, smaller details and dialogue never seem lost, and in terms of authenticity I've sometimes been fooled into thinking off-screen sounds are real! Also, things I'd never noticed before are highlighted, like fingers brushing a wall or a marker hissing across a whiteboard in the early part of

**'There are things I might like to tweak at some point, but right now I'm really happy with this room'**

*Stargate*. The various 'midnight' modes of the Denon AVR, which don't seem to hinder sound quality, also enable me to watch films more often without upsetting the neighbours.

Cinema isn't the full story in my room, though. Music is provided via a Sonos Connect, feeding ripped CDs from a NAS, internet radio, or Last FM to the Denon amp. The Sonos is part of a multiroom setup and has literally never skipped a beat in three-plus years. The sound is detailed and energetic at any volume, again with well controlled, solid bass. The delivery is neutral, clear, and full, with great texture to instruments and voices. Any kind of music seems to be delivered with finesse and emotion, and the cleanness and clarity of the sound is very obvious.

A few other elements that round off this room are worth mentioning. For me, visually, the Tannoy speakers add a touch of class, all organic curves, slick gloss, and modernist touches (such as the subwoofer's brushed

steel control panel and polished bullet-shaped knobs). A 26in Samsung (LE26C450) for casual TV-watching gives a vibrant, crisp picture, especially when driven by my ITB Humax HDR Fox T2 recorder. The Humax provides glorious HD pictures to the TV or projector, does a great job of SD upscaling, and can even stream or archive recordings to the network. Between them the Fox T2 and Samsung (BD-C6900) Blu-ray player cover off LoveFilm streams, BBC iPlayer, and pulling network video (including HD) from my NAS. Even bigscreen gaming is available via a Nintendo Wii U, and to top it off, everything is easily controlled via a Harmony 1 (or Android/Apple iPod apps for Sonos).

I have things I might like to tweak at some point, maybe experiment with a larger projector screen, or adding some sound-proofing, but right now I'm really happy with this room. When I can settle into it after a long day, preferably to watch a good film on Blu-ray, it's my idea of heaven ■

### BE IN HCC!

**EMAIL US:** If you want to share your home cinema setup with other readers, email a selection of hi-res pictures (including one of yourself if you want) to [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com) with the subject heading 'AV-Holic', and we'll be in touch.

# WIN!

# A high-end Primare SPA23

## WORTH £3,500!

Give your system the audio quality it deserves – and your kit rack a touch of luxury – with this high-performance five-channel AV amplifier



**PRIMARE HAS EARNED** a reputation in the AV world for its range of home cinema and hi-fi components that marry best-in-class performance with design panache, and its new SPA23 integrated amplifier cements this reputation even further. It's the ultimate upgrade to any system, and thanks to our friends at UK distributor Karma AV, you could soon be the proud owner of one!

### Hey, good lookin'

The latest addition to Primare's home theatre range, the SPA23 is AV partner in crime to the superb BD32 universal disc player, and like its stablemate it oozes visual class, with a minimalist front fascia and eye-catching brushed metal finish that will look great on your kit rack. Connectivity includes five HDMI inputs and dual outputs (enabling you

to feed both a TV and projector screen), plus digital and analogue audio inputs and outputs. IR and RS232 terminals ensure compatibility with home automation systems, and multichannel pre-outs enable the SPA23 to feed an external power amp.

Under the lid, Primare has worked hard to deliver premium sound quality. Each channel is driven by a 120W UFPD (Ultra Fast Power Device) amplifier, a bespoke audiophile Class D design that offers minimal distortion across the entire frequency range. These potent power reserves are joined by ultra low-noise circuit topology and a rigid heavyweight chassis for advanced signal purity.

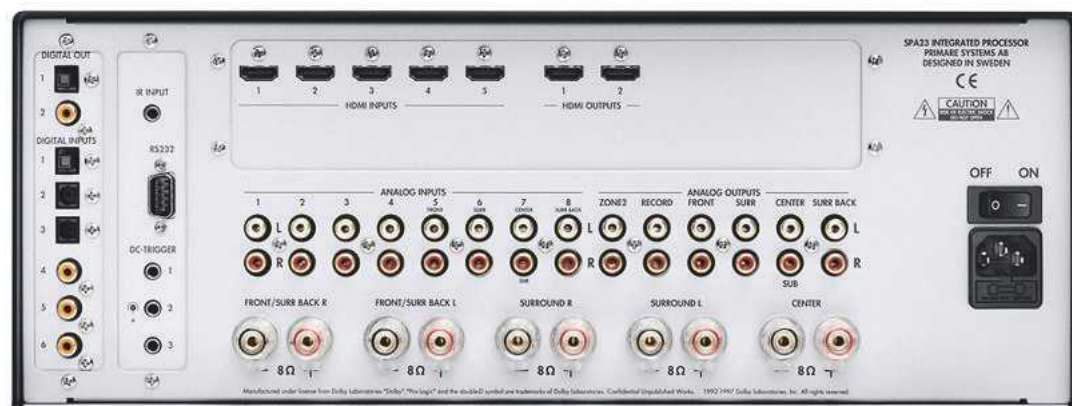
Audio codec support naturally includes Blu-ray's Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA formats, and there are additional processing options to experiment with, including dedicated sound modes. Each of the



# integrated amplifier



Twin HDMI outputs allow the Primare to feed both a TV and projector



SPA23's inputs can be assigned to an individual source, and the audio tweaked to your tastes further via precise adjustments for level, speaker type, crossover frequency, delay and bass management.

On sale now for £3,500, we have one SPA23 to give away – answer the following question to be in with a chance of winning!

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**A) 1955 B) 1985 C) 2005**

Email your answer, plus your name and full address, to: [Competitions@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:Competitions@homecinemachoice.com) – with 'Primare' as the subject

For more information on the Primare SPA23 visit: [www.karma-av.co.uk](http://www.karma-av.co.uk)

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# SYSTEM SELECTOR!

This issue, we assemble **a projection setup** that provides largescale Full HD visuals and multichannel audio for less than you might think



## 1. Projector Optoma HD30

This 1080p projector retails for £1,100, so represents a good first step for anyone who wants to evolve their setup from a flatscreen TV to something bigger.

Styled with neat curves and grey accents to complement the white chassis, it's the sort of PJ that won't cause alarm when sat on a coffee table or shelf, making it a good choice for a living room (it runs quite quietly, too). Also helpful in this respect is its provision of both horizontal and vertical image shift to aid installation – although the zoom is somewhat limited at 1.2x. It offers Active 3D in conjunction with a sync transmitter and two pairs of spex (supplied).

Performance from this single-chip DLP design is great for the money. Imagery is crisp and, in our experience, free from the rainbow effect such technology can throw up. It offers good calibration options, including colour management, but you may prefer to stick with the nicely-balanced Cinema preset. Connectivity includes twin HDMI inputs, but for this configuration we only need one...

### Also consider: Epson EH-TW5200

Save money and get this Full HD LCD model for around £750. Epson has marketed it as a gaming projector, but it's *au fait* with movies, too, despite a lack of contrast panache.

## 2. Speakers Roth OLi RA 5.1

The Optoma offers a 16W audio system, but you'd be mad to use it – to match its visual impact, you need an impactful speaker system. Equally, you won't want to spend too much, so Roth's recent OLi RA range is just the ticket, enabling you to assemble a 5.1 system for only £850.

The cabinets are great to look at and the audio quality is massively impressive, if a touch boisterous. Punching well above its weight, this Roth array offers a real sense of scale, handling soundtrack dynamics with aplomb and dispersing surround effects with pace. Integration between the fronts, centre and surrounds is good, and the 8in KH30 subwoofer is surprisingly potent.

### Also consider: Tannoy HTS-101

Want smaller speakers? This £350 sub/sat package will startle you with the size of its soundstage.





## AND ADD THESE...

Grab these accessories for an effective system boost

### Pioneer AS-WL300

Add this £50 dongle to the VSX-923 and you can do away with its Ethernet hookup in favour of Wi-Fi.

### Roku 3

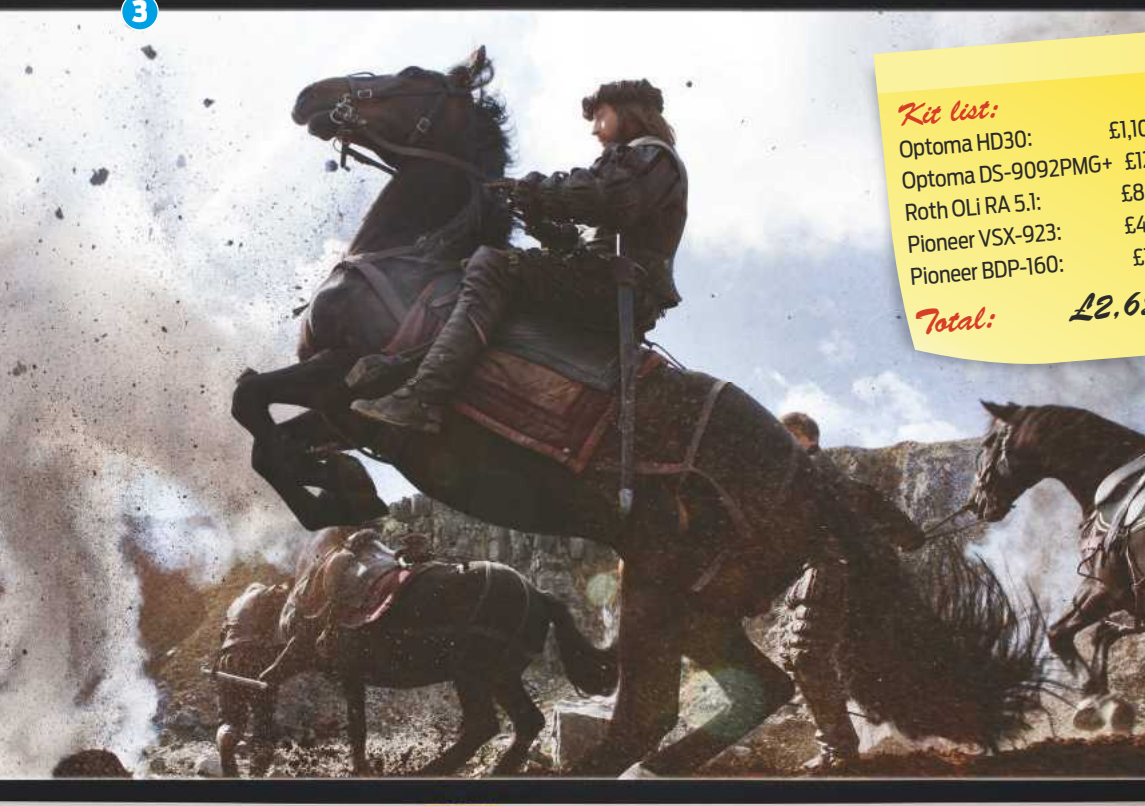
Having a projector rather than a TV means you miss out on some Smart functionality. Roku's £100 media player will soften the blow. Connect it into the AVR for rapid access to content apps including Netflix, Now TV, Tune-In radio, Crackle and more.



### DVDO Air

Cut out the HDMI connection between AVR and projector with this £400 wireless 1080p video sender – although you will need a power point to provide juice to both transmitter and receiver.

3



#### Kit list:

Optoma HD30:	£1,100
Optoma DS-9092PMG+	£120
Roth OLi RA 5.1:	£850
Pioneer VSX-923:	£450
Pioneer BDP-160:	£130

**Total:** £2,650

### 3. Screen

#### Optoma DS-9092PMG+

Marry the Optoma projector to a screen from the same brand. This 16:9 ratio model can be bought in sizes from 72in to 123in, with a 92in version setting you back around £120.

We're not getting involved with smart automation here – this screen instead comes with a manual pulldown and SelfLock system to hold it in place.

When retracting, the mechanism ensures it slows down to avoid damaging the screen material (a matte white, 1.0 gain, four-layer fabric).

#### Also consider:

##### Screen Innovations Black Diamond

For the ultimate in projector style, this fixed-frame edgeless screen works in well-lit rooms courtesy of its highly reflective material. It costs £3,000, though!

### 4. AV receiver

#### Pioneer VSX-923

We're auditioning the follow-up to this lower mid-range AVR next issue, but all that means is that you should be able to snap up Pioneer's 2013 seven-channel model for peanuts – we've seen it listed at just £250, down from its £450 launch price.

Offering the standard connectivity for this point in the market (including 7-in, 2-out HDMI), the VSX-923's tight, controlled delivery and neutral tone should help keep the Roth speakers' lively performance in check. Steering delivery and detailing are perhaps its best traits, with the Pioneer relishing complex movie mixes. The result is pure immersion.

Operation from the handset can become a bit of a chore, so try out the control app if you have a smartphone or tablet – it's one of the best around, transforming everyday use into heaps of fun.

#### Also consider: Yamaha RX-V675

Similarly priced and specced to the Pioneer, but with a more spacious, even 'airy', soundstage.

### 5. BD player

#### Pioneer BDP-160



Again, a Pioneer component that has just had its successor announced, but the BDP-160 won't become a poor choice just because the BDP-170 is soon to arrive. Spec this deck not only because it provides a neat aesthetic match to the AVR, but because it's a brilliant performer, spinning BDs with sharp, unfettered images and even offering SACD compatibility. Design and build feels more robust than much of the competition at this price – it's just a lack of video-on-demand that holds it back a little.

#### Also consider: Xbox One

Why limit yourself to bigscreen movies? This next-gen console adds HD gaming to the equation, as well as (2D-only) BD playback.

## NEXT ISSUE...

#### HIGH-END THX-CERTIFIED SETUP:

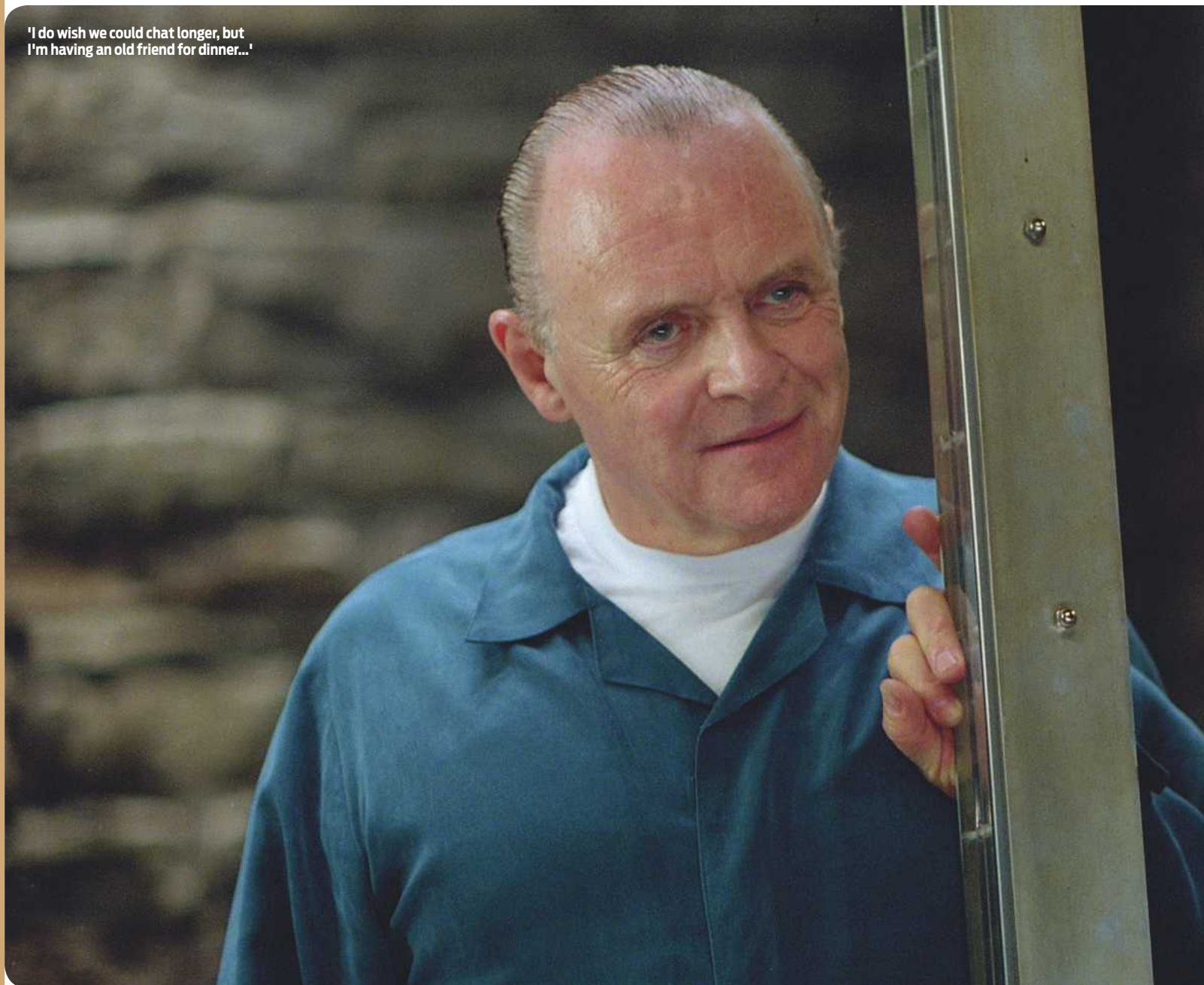
We assemble a 7.2-channel cinema using speakers, amp and display that all get the THX seal of approval. So don't expect it to be cheap...

FILM FRANCHISE

# Hannibal Lecter

Revisit the screen series that made a killing from our fascination with mental murderers

'I do wish we could chat longer, but I'm having an old friend for dinner...'



**FOLLOWING A DECADE** of prominence as the ultimate in bigscreen bogeymen, by the time the 1980s drew to a close Freddy Krueger, Jason Voorhees and Michael Myers were mere shadows of their former selves, no longer capable of scaring even the most nervous of filmgoers.

Thankfully, salvation was at hand with the 1991 release of Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs*. Adapted from the 1988 novel of the same name by Thomas Harris, the film told the story of a young FBI trainee

(Jodie Foster) who must seek the help of imprisoned psychiatrist-turned-killer Hannibal 'the cannibal' Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) in the hunt for another serial killer.

A skillful blend of police procedural plotting and cues from the horror genre (Hannibal's cell looks more like the basement of Castle Dracula than a high-security hospital for the criminally insane), *The Silence of the Lambs* quickly became one of the year's most talked about and popular films – sweeping the board in the major categories at both the subsequent

Academy Awards and horror magazine *Fangoria*'s Chainsaw Awards.

## Keep on killing

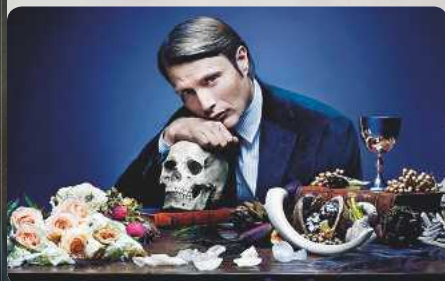
Yet that wasn't Hannibal's first appearance on film. The character had appeared in Thomas Harris' earlier novel *Red Dragon*, adapted for cinemagoers by Michael Mann as *Manhunter* in 1986. Sadly that film flopped at the box office, with most fans only rediscovering Brian Cox's more cerebral take on the character when canny distributors re-issued the movie on VHS





**Foster care:** Before she dropped out of the film completely, Jodie Foster insisted on several rewrites for the *Hannibal* script following her misgivings about the story's treatment of Clarice Starling.

**Planning ahead:** The current plan is for the *Hannibal* TV series to run for seven years, eventually adapting *Red Dragon*, *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal* before giving the character a new finale.



in the early '90s, to cash-in on the success of *...Lambs*.

But it was Hopkins' broader take on this new breed of urbane and cultured nutjob that captured the public zeitgeist at the time. It ushered in three further adventures for the character (including Ridley Scott's *Grand Guignol*-influenced *Hannibal* and a bland re-staging of *Red Dragon* with Hopkins), and countless copycat killers who continue to dominate the thriller genre. Meanwhile Freddy Krueger and pals are almost forgotten...

## PICK OF THE BEST...

### 1 Manhunter

A flop on its original cinema release in 1986, Michael Mann's adaptation of *Red Dragon* has undergone something of a critical reappraisal, and is now lauded as a particularly sleek and effective thriller. Indeed, you only have to look at Brett Ratner's subsequent 2002 adaptation of the same book to understand how Mann's stylised visuals lift the material to a whole new level.

### 2 The Silence of the Lambs

Like Michael Mann before him, director Jonathan Demme eschewed the idea of a simple adaptation of Thomas Harris' second novel featuring Hannibal Lecter. Instead, Demme mixed the traditional thriller narrative with a visual style straight out of the Gothic horror tradition to astonishing effect.

### 3 Hannibal (TV Series)

Now in its second season, this sinister series is one of the most beautifully-shot TV shows around – as well as one of the goriest. A large part of its success also stems from Mads Mikkelsen's utterly chilling performance as the title character.

## AND THE WORST...

### Hannibal Rising

It's hard to believe that Thomas Harris himself was responsible for the script to this misguided prequel. While the idea of exploring Hannibal Lecter's evolution into a cultivated cannibal isn't entirely without merit, casting him as an avenging vigilante was a serious misstep. Tainting the movies that came before it, this is best left unwatched.

## COLLECTIBLES

No self-respecting fan can afford to miss out on these...

### Red Dragon [first edition]



Show you've been a Lecter-lover right from the start by owning a 1981 first edition hardback of Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon*. Or, if you want to fake it, a UK hardback should set you back around £50.

### Hannibal Lecter action figure



NECA has produced several Hannibal Lecter figures over the years, with our favourite being this 2006 model recreating the holding cell escape from *The Silence of the Lambs*.

### Don Post Studios Hannibal Lecter Half-Mask



While there are countless replicas of Hannibal's iconic half-mask available, this officially licensed piece is made of fibreglass and was crafted by the artisans at the legendary Don Post Studios.

### The Silence of the Lambs Criterion Collection DVD



This out-of-print R1 DVD may not be able to hold its own in AV terms with those that followed, but it's highly sought after due to its exclusive cast and crew audio commentary.

## THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION...

Watch these DVDs and BDs while you enjoy liver, fava beans and a nice chianti

### The Silence of the Lambs [Criterion Collection]

(R1 DVD – US Import)

### Manhunter: Limited Edition

(R1 DVD – US Import)

### Hannibal: Two-Disc Special Edition (R2 DVD)

### The Silence of the Lambs: Special Edition (R2 DVD)

### Manhunter (R2 DVD)

### Manhunter: Special Edition (R2 DVD)

### Red Dragon: 2 Disc Edition (R2 DVD)

### Manhunter: Restored Director's Cut (R1 DVD)

### The Silence of the Lambs: Definitive Edition (R2 DVD)

### Hannibal Rising (Region B BD)

### The Silence of the Lambs (All-region BD)

### Hannibal (All-region BD)

### Red Dragon (All-region BD)

### The Hannibal Lecter Collection [Manhunter/The Silence of the Lambs/

### Lambs/

### Hannibal]

### (Region A BD)

### The Hannibal Lecter Trilogy [Red Dragon/The

### Silence of the Lambs]

### Silence of the Lambs/ Hannibal] (All-region BD)

### Manhunter (Region B BD)

### The Silence of the Lambs [Limited Edition Steelbook]

### (All-region BD/R2 DVD)

### The Silence of the Lambs [Comic Con 2013 Exclusive Sleeve] (All-region BD)

### Hannibal: Season One (Region A BD)

### Hannibal: The Complete Season One (Region B BD)







IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC

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# PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **TRUE DETECTIVE** HBO's acclaimed crime series goes HD **THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY** A short story becomes an epic spectacle **INSIDE LLEWYN DAVIS** Coen Brothers' latest sounds sublime on Blu-ray **RE-ANIMATOR** '80s horror classic gets a spectacular new restoration **VERONICA MARS** Crowdfunding brings cult TV series back to life on DVD **AND MUCH MORE!**



**Legal copy**  
RoboCop → StudioCanal → Region B BD

**HCC RATINGS KEY...**

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

To find out how we rate the Blu-ray release of the big-budget *RoboCop* remake, turn to page 96. And quickly: you have 30 seconds to comply...



Ben Stiller prepares for the lead role in the big budget Hollywood remake of *Kes*



# Big adaptation of a small story

Ben Stiller's daydream believer is sure to be a hit with those seeking an awesome AV experience

## → THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY

Ben Stiller's latest directorial outing sees the Hollywood funnyman take a break from the farcical humour of *Zoolander* and *Tropic Thunder* for something a little more heart-felt.

Using James Thurber's famous 1939 short story of the same name as its springboard, the film stars Stiller as the titular Mitty, a socially awkward magazine employee [sounds familiar – Ed] who regularly escapes from his mundane life through fantastical daydreams. Yet when the negative for the cover photo of the final issue of *Life* magazine goes missing, Mitty must leave his dreams behind and embark on a real globetrotting adventure to track down photographer Sean O'Connell (Sean Penn).

While it's definitely not short of laughs, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*'s celebration of the everyman is a much smarter and more dramatic film than you might expect. And unlike most feel-good movies, under Stiller's guidance this one manages to deliver plenty of breathtaking spectacle that helps bring its escapist fable to life.

**Picture:** *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* has been art designed to within an inch of its life and looks absolutely superb in hi-def. Framed at 2.40:1, the AVC encode delivers a lush viewing experience populated by bold colours, dramatic blacks, superb depth of field and pixel-perfect detailing. There is a tendency for the colour grading to push a blue tint to the fore, but this is nothing more than a stylistic



### HCC VERDICT

#### The Secret Life of Walter Mitty

→ 20th Century Fox

→ All-region BD → £25 Approx

**WE SAY:** Ben Stiller's latest packs in plenty of heart alongside some majestic AV spectacle on Blu-ray

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

concern and has no impact on any other part of the film's 1080p presentation.

**Audio:** This BD's audio is equally enthralling. Naturally, Mitty's flights of fantasy provide the biggest playgrounds for the DTS-HD MA 7.1 soundtrack, with the explosion in Chapter 2 and an almost superheroic street fight in Chapter 9 delivering a potent mix of zippy positional effects and room-shaking bass.

However, the soundtrack also impresses when it comes to the 'real world' elements, whether it's something simple like surrounding you with the hustle and bustle of an office or something rather more exciting, like the roar of a helicopter as it flies across the soundstage. And the finely judged balance of dialogue and music, alongside these more expansive and atmospheric elements, ensures it gets our five-star seal of approval.

**Extras:** 20th Century Fox's Blu-ray platter hosts an interesting selection of bonus features, kicking off with a series of five deleted scenes, two extended scenes and two alternate scenes. Following this comes a collection of nine behind-the-scenes featurettes – *The History of Walter Mitty*, *The Look of Life*, *That's a Shark!*, *The Music of Walter Mitty*, *Icelandic Adventure*, *Nordic Casting* and *Titles of Walter Mitty*, *Skateboarding Through Iceland* and *Ted-Walter Fight*. Rounding things out are a pre-viz reel for Walter and Ted's elevator fight, a gallery of a dozen location reference photographs and the music video for the song *Stay Alive* by José González. Not a bad little bunch.



## Dallas Buyers Club

EntertainmentOne → Region B BD  
£23 Approx



This award-winning drama finds Matthew McConaughey shedding the pounds to play real-life HIV sufferer Ron

Woodruff, who started a business dealing unapproved drugs to help combat the illness. While it smooths off some of the rougher elements of the real Woodruff and his operation, *Dallas Buyers Club* remains a powerful polemic aimed at taking the medical industry to task for its initially slow response to the AIDS crisis. Understandably, this Blu-ray is hardly an AV showstopper, but both the AVC 2.40:1 encode and DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix feel true to the source material.



## Ninja: Shadow of a Tear

Lionsgate → Region B BD  
£23 Approx



Following firmly in the tradition of old VHS favourites like *American Ninja*, this sequel to

2009's *Ninja* is a throwback to the martial arts action films of the 1980s. Unfortunately, while the fight scenes are breathtaking, the film commits the cardinal sin of failing to build a genuinely threatening opponent for its leading man (the awesome Scott Adkins) to face off against. That said, the one area where it really delivers a knockout blow is with its spectacularly detailed AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode and ludicrously powerful DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack.



## OldBoy

Universal Pictures → All-region BD  
£25 Approx



That this US remake of the acclaimed Korean thriller doesn't hold a candle to the original is hardly surprising. That

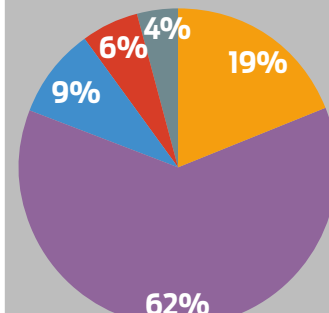
director Spike Lee put so little of himself into the film is quite shocking, though, resulting in a bland and anonymous piece of filmmaking that quite easily be the work of any hired-hand. Given the reports of studio interference that dogged the production, it's hardly surprising to find that the Blu-ray doesn't offer much in the way of extras – just a pair of extremely brief promo featurettes. On a more positive note, the disc does at least deliver a pretty strong AV experience.



## WE ASKED...

Which is the best of Hannibal Lecter's screen outings?

Manhunter The Silence of the Lambs Hannibal (Film) Red Dragon Hannibal (TV)



Results from [www.homecinemachoice.com](http://www.homecinemachoice.com)  
Go online for more polling action



# Singing the praises of the Coens

Acclaimed filmmakers compose a touching tribute to New York's folk music scene

## → INSIDE LLEWYN DAVIS

The latest film from Joel and Ethan Coen takes us back to 1961 to follow the travails of Greenwich Village folk musician Llewyn Davis (Oscar Isaac). Formerly part of a duo, Davis has reinvented himself as a solo artist since his partner's suicide – which wouldn't necessarily be such a bad thing if his album was selling. So Davis packs up his guitar (and a friend's cat) and heads across country for a last-ditch effort at impressing the music mogul who could give him the big break his career needs.

Equal parts tragedy and comedy, this is exactly the sort of deftly-observed flick that fans have come to expect from the Coens. While the melancholy tone threatens to overwhelm the characters, its held in check by the script's dark humour, an excellent cast and the wonderful range of musical performances. Perfect for a nice relaxed evening.

**Picture:** *Inside Llewyn Davis* favours a desaturated colour palette, resulting in a rather cold aesthetic, with even skin tones erring towards zombie territory. Still, this doesn't appear to have any impact on detailing, with a fine array of well-drawn textures evident in the period costumes. Those with a keen eye for such things will spot a few instances of banding and black crush in the AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode, but overall this is a solid transfer.

**Audio:** While *Inside Llewyn Davis*' DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 soundtrack isn't the most aggressive or potent around, when it comes to the musical numbers it's an unqualified success. There's a natural smoothness to the tonal range that brings out the best in the material, while the accompanying



Working with animals gives all actors paws for thought

vocals are handled sublimely. Away from this the 5.1 mix is pretty low-key. Subtle ambience in the surrounds helps liven up the locations and dialogue is never anything less than clear, but there's little LF extension to get excited about.

**Extras:** There's only one extra on the disc, but at least it's a good one. The 43-minute *Inside Llewyn Davis* is a detailed look at the making of the film, with particular focus on the casting and the pre-recording of the musical numbers. In addition to Joel and Ethan Coen, the documentary also features interviews with most of the cast and music supervisors T. Bone Burnett and Marcus Mumford.

To support this release, distributor StudioCanal has also released the concert film *Another Day, Another Time: Celebrating the Music of Inside Llewyn Davis* on Blu-ray in the UK – although it's a little strange that they didn't also think to do a double-pack of the two titles.



## HCC VERDICT

**Inside Llewyn Davis**

→ StudioCanal → Region B BD

→ £23 Approx

**WE SAY:** The lossless soundtrack is enough to guarantee this Blu-ray a euphoric reception from fans

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Struggling to attract new fans, MotoGP's governing body unveils a radical overhaul for the 2015 season



## DEMO SCREEN...

## RoboCop

Time code: 080.52 – 084.04



**Explosive entry:** Never one to let a locked door stand between him and a criminal, RoboCop hurtles through it on his motorbike. The roar of an explosion and sound of gunfire fill the 5.1 soundfield.



**Lights out:** Trying to get the upper hand, the criminals kill the lights and use night vision to track RoboCop, giving your screen the chance to demonstrate how well it deals with greyscale images.



**Feel the heat:** However, RoboCop has a few tricks of his own, including thermal imaging. Looking like something out of the *Call of Duty* games, it's an excellent test of your system's red handling.



**Arresting audio:** The Blu-ray's DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix dazzles throughout the sequence, climaxing with the sound of RoboCop's footsteps fading away over a black screen.





# More man than machine

Greater focus on the man behind the armour makes this Robo-reboot worth a look

## → ROBOPOLICE

Brazilian director José Padilha had a thankless task ahead of him when it came to remaking *RoboCop*. Mixing together shocking violence and worryingly prescient satire, Paul Verhoeven's peerless 1987 original is regarded as a classic by the majority of film fans, making the very notion of a remake even more redundant than usual. But despite having all of the odds stacked against it, this film more than justifies its existence with some big ideas of its own.

The movie opens with a news piece highlighting the use of OmniCorp's robots in keeping the peace on the streets of Tehran. However, as with current drone technology, things don't go well, with an ED-209 unable to tell the difference between an armed terrorist and a scared teenager holding a knife. This distinction between how a machine and a man would react in the same situation threatens to keep OmniCorp from unleashing its robots to fight crime in the US – until some bright spark at the company comes up with the idea of merging a man with a machine. All they need now is to get their hands on a suitable candidate...

Pretty much ignoring the mean streets of Detroit, this film is far more concerned with corporate misdeeds and the use of drone tech. The latter plays directly into the emotional core of the film, with OmniCorp scientists having to remove more and more of Murphy's humanity to make him a more effective 'soldier', only for his memories to keep on bleeding through. And while the studio insisted on dialing back the violence this time around, Padilha's film still has the power to shock – most notably in the scene where we see just how little of the real Alex Murphy still exists under the armour.

No, it's not as good as the original, but this next-gen *RoboCop* presents a fresh approach to the material that makes it easy to recommend.



Ladies can't resist the lure of a man in uniform...

**Picture:** Framed at 2.40:1 and utilising an AVC 1080p encode, StudioCanal's Blu-ray delivers pretty much everything you'd expect from a modern \$130million blockbuster – robust colours, terrific detailing, deep blacks and excellent clarity. That said, director José Padilha's fondness for employing handheld cameras does sometimes result in a minor drop in sharpness during the more frantic action scenes. This is a minor caveat, however; generally it's a great-looking Full HD image.

**Audio:** From the moment the aerial drones swoop into action over the streets of Tehran in Chapter 2, and the sound of ED-209's guns fill the soundstage, it becomes clear that this version of *RoboCop* is up to the task of delivering some truly awesome multichannel mayhem.

The DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix creates an expansive soundstage for its action scenes to play out against. Scenes such as Chapter 3's restaurant shootout and RoboCop's showdown with a trio of ED-209s in Chapter 28 demonstrate terrific dynamic range, precise effects steering and a tight, rich, powerful low-end.

Away from the action the mix also showcases clarity of dialogue and a lively musicality. The latter proves particularly handy when the sound designers play with our expectations, such as the use of *Hocus Pocus* by Focus to background the action when RoboCop goes up against an army of 'bots at the OmniCorp testing facility in Chapter 14.

**Extras:** After scoring so well with its picture and sound credentials, StudioCanal's hi-def platter unfortunately comes a bit of a cropper when it comes to supplementary features.

First up is a collection of five brief deleted scenes that help build up some of the supporting characters and fill in some tiny gaps in the narrative. There's nothing truly groundbreaking here, but the film may still have benefitted from at least one or two of them making it into the final cut.

After this comes a look at the film's weapons and robots disguised as ten OmniCorp corporate videos. Yet with none of the pieces lasting more than 30 seconds there's very little to be learnt, and their inclusion smacks of padding out the disc.

Far more useful is the disc's trio of behind-the-scenes featurettes. *The Illusion of Free Will* (eight minutes) explores the idea behind remaking *RoboCop* and the 'real world concepts' the film sets out to explore. *To Serve and Protect* (six minutes) focuses on the cast's weapon training and the design of RoboCop's guns and motorbike. The rather self-explanatory *The RoboCop Suit* (15 minutes) rounds things off by looking at the work that went into redesigning the iconic costume (and upsetting fans in the process).

Finally, there's the UK theatrical trailer. Like all of the other extras it is presented in 1080p.



Noah director Darren Aronofsky was originally lined up to helm the film before José Padilha (*Elite Squad*) was hired



## HCC VERDICT

### RoboCop

→ StudioCanal → Region B BD

→ £23 Approx

**WE SAY:** Not only does this reboot hold up better than expected, it also delivers some serious AV thrills

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

## ARCADE ACTION

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. Check out these two videogames vying for time on your home cinema system...

### Titanfall

Electronic Arts → Xbox One/Xbox 360/PC → £50 Approx



It sometimes feels like the only point of innovation most game developers bring to online shooters is the variety of weapons players are given to kill each other. Where *Titanfall* succeeds is its focus on redefining how you move around the world on offer.

The addition of wall-running and jetpack-enabled double jumps may not sound like much, but together they completely change the style of the game, adding greater fluidity to your movement and making navigating other first-person shooters feel like wading through mud by comparison. And then there are the titular Titans, giant three-storey mechs you can call down from the skies to pilot, waging even greater destruction on all of your enemies.

*Titanfall*'s online-only nature means that the quality of your experience is dependant on the other players to a certain degree, but the 12 players (six on each side of the conflict) are joined by countless robotic grunts with a good range of AI settings. It's a shame that in order to get the very best out of this hyped Xbox One title, the developer forces you to battle through two forgettable campaign modes in order to unlock all the customisable options for your Titan. Still, it's a small flaw and one that's easily overlooked, thanks to *Titanfall*'s gorgeous graphics and pulse-pounding run-and-gun action.



### Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes

Konami → PS4/PS3/Xbox One/Xbox 360 → £30 Approx



Fans of the long-running and convoluted *Metal Gear* franchise may be left feeling a little short-changed by this latest addition.

*Ground Zeroes* is described as a prequel/prologue to next year's *Metal Gear Solid: Phantom Pain* (the two titles, says developer Kojima Productions, form a singular work), and that's certainly apparent in terms of the scope on offer.



Completing it shouldn't pose any problems to competent gamers, with the side-missions and main storyline holding your attention for a few hours, maximum.

However, gameplay is exquisite, and you'll probably end up replaying in order to do things differently second time around and receive a better stealth rating. And with *Ground Zeroes* utilising an open-world setting (the Guantanamo-style Camp Omega) there's plenty to do. The AI of the camp's guards is excellent, and you'll need to think carefully about your tactics as you pick your way throughout the sandbox environment. All this can make a for a very tense, involved experience.

And what an environment to look at! Played on the PS4, *Ground Zeroes* wows with its hi-def graphics, oozing sharpness, texture and a superb appreciation of lighting. On a bigscreen, it's impressively atmospheric.



### Princess Mononoke

StudioCanal → Region B BD  
£25 Approx



Probably the most adult of Hideo Miyazaki's animated films, *Princess Mononoke* doesn't shy away from the realities of the violence that surrounds its central conflict

between industrialisation and the environment. Arresting stuff that should cast a powerful spell over those who watch it. While this release disappoints a touch when it comes to extras, the impressive AVC 1.85:1 imagery and DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics are enough to make it a must for animation fans.



### Ace in the Hole

Eureka! Masters of Cinema  
Region B BD/R2 DVD → £23 Approx



Billy Wilder's scathing account of the media circus that erupts around a man trapped by a cave-in failed to find an appreciative audience on its original release. Thankfully,

time has been kind to this smart and cynical film, and this delightful Blu-ray release will hopefully expose its charms to an even wider audience. The AVC 1.33:1 1080p picture and LPCM 2.0 dual-mono soundtrack have both been well restored, and even if it doesn't match up to Criterion's US disc in its breadth of supplementary features, the few included are fantastic.



### The Delta Force

Arrow Video → Region B BD  
£23 Approx



Watched today this '80s action flick is an unusual beast. While the bulk of the film plays out as a fairly authentic recreation of the 1985 hijacking of TWA Flight 847, the finale unleashes

a mullet-haired Chuck Norris on a missile-firing motorbike to sort it all out. Silly it may be, but it's also undeniably entertaining. Arrow Video's hi-def outing is guaranteed to please with a strong 1.85:1 1080p restoration and powerful LPCM stereo mix. Modest extras include interviews and a 40-page booklet.





Herbert West learns how to get ahead in his medical research



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# Restoring the dead back to life

Stuart Gordon's notorious 1980s shocker gets a brand-new lease of life in high-definition

## → RE-ANIMATOR

The 1980s were a particularly exciting time for horror fans. Filmmakers constantly tried to outdo each other by pushing harder and harder at the boundaries of good taste. Yet outside of the gallons of gore being unleashed on screen many of the movies contained little else of note. Stuart Gordon's *Re-Animator* was another matter altogether...

Based on H.P. Lovecraft's six *Herbert West – Reanimator* short stories, Gordon's film certainly doesn't skimp on the blood. Even now some of set-pieces are as outrageous and shocking as ever. But, remarkably, this is balanced by a healthy jolt of satire and some winning performances from the leads, resulting in characters that you actually end up caring about – and surely that is the biggest shock of all.

**Picture:** Second Sight's Blu-ray contains a brilliant new 1080p restoration. Image fidelity is strong, with plenty of fine detail evident in close-ups, and there's a nice contrast between the vibrant, sometimes gaudy, colours and rock-solid blacks. There are shots that suffer from a slight lack in sharpness, but we suspect this is down to the source elements.

*Re-Animator* has traditionally been presented in a 1.85:1 aspect ratio, yet this BD opts for 1.78:1 instead. However, rather than crop the image slightly, this actually appears to have been achieved by exposing the full image on negative. A cursory comparison between a frame from the film's pre-credit sequence



and the same shot from the bonus documentary (where it is framed at 1.85:1) shows noticeably more information at left and bottom of the picture.

The alternate 'Integral Version' of the film (see 'Extras' below) has clearly been subject to a similar level of restoration.

**Audio:** The uncut version of *Re-Animator* offers a choice of LPCM stereo or DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtracks (only the latter is available on the 'Integral Version'). Both sound pretty good for a 1980s horror, with excellent dialogue and music reproduction, as well as creating a modestly expansive front-end. The 5.1 mix sounds a tad more open thanks to subtle use of the rears for atmospheric effect, but not so much that it makes for a radically different experience.

**Extras:** The only new extra here is the 'Integral Cut' of the film. Running 19 minutes longer than the original release, it restores all of the excised material previously only available as extended/deleted scenes. Due to resulting pacing issues it's more of a curio than anything, but fans should still be delighted by its presence.

The remaining extras are all familiar from previous DVD platters, but are just as welcome as ever. The 'uncut' version of the film is accompanied by a pair of fantastically fun and informative commentary tracks. The platter containing the 'Integral Version' also serves up five interviews, the hour-long *Re-Animator Resurrectus* documentary, a deleted scene, 17 extended scenes, six trailer and two photo galleries.



Bruce Abbott gets hands-on with scream queen co-star Barbara Crampton



## HCC VERDICT

**Re-Animator**  
→ Second Sight → Region B BD  
→ £26 Approx

**WE SAY:** An astonishing hi-def debut for one of the most outrageous and exhilarating fright flicks of the 1980s

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★

**Delivery Man**EntertainmentOne → Region B BD  
£23 ApproxKen Scott isn't the first director to remake his own film (the 2011 French-Canadian comedy *Starbuck*), but

you have to wonder if something hasn't got lost in the translation here. Despite the presence of Vince Vaughn in the lead role as a frequent sperm donor who turns out to have fathered 533 children, *Delivery Man* is an oddly leaden affair that favours mawkish sentiment over laughs. It doesn't offer much to get excited about in AV terms, either. The 1080p encode does the best it can with the rather unambitious imagery, and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is extremely front-heavy.

**Hustlers**Lionsgate → Region B BD  
£25 Approx

Not even a small role for the late Paul Walker can spark much interest in this dismal Southern-fried portmanteau flick.

Uneven in tone and with absolutely nothing original to say for itself, it's a thoroughly dispiriting affair that far outstays its welcome. That said, it is a pretty stylish flick that looks sharp and colourful on Blu-ray thanks to the well-handled AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode (which switches to 2.40:1 for a couple of scenes). The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix also sounds robust, with plenty of separation around the entire soundstage. The sole extra is a director's commentary.

**Bastards**Artificial Eye → Region B BD  
£25 Approx

This harrowing drama from French filmmaker Claire Denis follows a brooding merchant marine who returns

home after his brother-in-law commits suicide and his niece is hospitalised as the result of an unknown sexual trauma. What follows could have made for a gripping revenge drama, but Denis infuriatingly keeps us too far removed from the characters to ever really engage with them. The disc itself is another solid HD package from Artificial Eye. While the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is rather subdued, the AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode looks excellent. It also includes a 19-min reel of test footage.

**Veronica Mars**Warner Home Video → R2 DVD  
£15 ApproxThe TV series only lasted three seasons, but *Veronica Mars*' fans never gave up, raising the \$2million needed

(in less than ten hours via Kickstarter) to make this movie. Was it worth it? If you're a fan of the show's knowing humour and soapy love triangles, yes. Others may be left questioning the rather slapdash handling of the murder mystery plot. With no BD on the cards in the UK, we're left with this DVD outing. Thankfully the anamorphic 2.40:1 visuals and DD 5.1 audio both hold up well, and the disc also includes a 53-min doc about the film's unusual journey to the screen.



# Play with fire and you'll get burnt

This grim and gritty drama thrives on great performances from its all-star cast

**→ OUT OF THE FURNACE**

Scott Cooper's blue collar drama starts with a bang as Woody Harrelson's Hillbilly criminal Harlan unleashes his anger issues on the woman who accompanied him to the drive-in, and then on another patron who tries to come to her rescue.

From there things don't get much more cheerful as the focus shifts to steel mill worker Russell Baze (Christian Bale), a generally decent guy who makes one stupid mistake and ends up in jail. By the time he gets out his girlfriend Lena (Zoë Saldana) has left him for a local cop (Forrest Whitaker) and his younger brother Rodney (Casey Affleck) has returned from another tour in Iraq with a bad case of PTSD.

We won't spoil how all of this ties back to Harrelson's Harlan, but suffice to say it isn't pretty. This is grim, terse stuff, which would be almost unbearable if it wasn't for the excellent performances and the palpable sense of place the film generates. Just don't expect a happy ending.

**Picture:** *Out of the Furnace*'s visual style is the perfect match to the story's tone. Dark, drab and relentlessly oppressive, it's easy to see the challenges the material would have presented when it came to bringing the movie to Blu-ray.

The good news is that Lionsgate has done a magnificent job with the AVC 2.40:1 1080p image. While the colour palette is understandably muted, contrast and clarity are both excellent, resulting in a finely detailed encode. In addition, subtle gradations in tone are free from the sort of banding and artefacting that frequently affect similarly monochromatic imagery.

**HCC VERDICT**

**Out of the Furnace**  
→ Lionsgate → Region B BD  
→ £23 Approx

**WE SAY:** Despite the lack of extras this is a technically-accomplished disc for a bleak and uncompromising film

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★☆☆☆

Overall ★★★★★



**Audio:** As the director is keen to point out in one of the disc's featurettes, music plays a significant role in establishing the mood of *Out of the Furnace*, and this is just one of the strengths of the disc's DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 soundtrack. The mix also makes good use of the surround channels for atmospheric effect, while dialogue is high in the mix (even if there's a tendency for some of the cast to mumble their lines).

**Extras:** Special features are thin on the ground on this Blu-ray release. *Inspiration* (four minutes) lets the cast discuss the films and actors who inspired them to get into the business. *Scott Cooper* (seven minutes) profiles the film's director and discusses locations and themes. *Crafting the Fight Scenes* (five minutes) has the stunt director discuss choreographing and shooting the bare-knuckle bouts. Finally, *The Music of Out of the Furnace* (nine minutes) does what you'd expect.



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Matthew couldn't believe how long it always took Woody to do up his fly



# Truly arresting television drama



The biggest crime of all would be not treating yourself to this remarkable crime series on Blu-ray

## → TRUE DETECTIVE: SEASON ONE



### HCC VERDICT

#### True Detective: Season One

→ HBO Home Entertainment

→ All-region BD → £40 Approx

**WE SAY:** It's a mystery why there aren't more extras, but otherwise this is a superb set for a stunning TV show

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★☆☆☆

Overall ★★★★★

Back in 1995 Louisiana detectives Martin Hart (Woody Harrelson) and Rustin Cohle (Matthew McConaughey) solved the ritualistic murder of a former prostitute that was connected to a series of other missing person reports. Flash-forward to 2012 and it looks like the murders have started up again. So what exactly happened all those years ago and why did the now-retired cops' friendship come to such a bitter end?

This eight-part HBO drama is quite simply one of the most memorable and involving crime series of recent times, taking us on a stylish and compelling journey into the darkest parts of the human psyche. Eschewing the fast-paced style favoured by most of its contemporaries, the show's measured storytelling allows all its characters the room to breath, resulting in a number of *tour de force* performances – not least from its leads. TV drama at its absolute best.

**Picture:** Shot on location in Louisiana, *True Detective* manages the remarkable feat of feeling even more cinematic than the rest of HBO's acclaimed TV output, courtesy of some startling cinematography. And by spreading the eight hour-long episodes across a trio of BD50 platters, the label has ensured that they look enthralling on Blu-ray.

Colour reproduction and fine detailing are both absolutely faultless. Blacks reveal impressive depth and contrast is perfectly handled. Also, the decision to shoot the show on 35mm film stock is replicated

expertly on the digital format, with a fine patina of native grain evident throughout.

**Audio:** *True Detective's* DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack doesn't make particularly widespread use of the entire soundstage, but there's still a lot to like here. The show's rich dialogue sounds incredibly natural and is prioritised in the mix, while Foley effects are delivered cleanly. However, it's the treatment of the show's dark and brooding music that impresses the most, helping to give the series its terrifyingly doom-laden atmosphere.

**Extras:** Following the usual HBO template, each episode is accompanied by optional previews and recaps, as well as brief *Inside the Episode* behind-the-scenes featurettes. Also included are a pair of fairly inconsequential deleted scenes.

Of far more interest are the set's two episode commentaries. Series creator Nic Pizzolatto and composer T. Bone Burnett do the honours on the fourth episode, while they're joined by executive producer Scott Stephens on episode five. Also well worth a look is a 14-minute chat with Pizzolatto and Burnett, which covers both the show's music and a fairly in-depth discussion of the themes it explores.

Sadly, the 15-minute *Making of True Detective* featurette is too short to give anything more than the briefest overview of the production process. Even more disappointing though is *Up Close and Personal with Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson*, which is little more than a collection of four extremely brief soundbite interview snippets from the superstar actors.



## True Blood: Season Six

HBO Home Entertainment  
All-region BD → £45 Approx



Telepathic waitress Sookie Stackhouse (Anna Paquin) takes a bit of a back seat in this penultimate outing of

the supernatural series. Instead, the focus (happily) shifts squarely on to her former vampire lovers as they become the hunted when a local politician turns public opinion against the undead. It's enjoyable stuff that's sure to please fans – as is this superb four-disc Blu-ray set. The AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes are crisply detailed, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtracks are full of energy and there's a good mix of extras, including five episode commentaries.



## Da Vinci's Demons: Series One

2Entertain → Region B BD  
£30 Approx



The brainchild of *Batman Begins* scribe David S. Goyer, this US-UK co-production re-imagines the famous

artist and inventor as a kind of historical superhero caught up in a world of political intrigue and mystical conspiracies. Daft? You bet! But it's also a lot of fun and the eight episodes that make up this debut season are over far too soon. This three-disc set looks and sounds spiffy thanks to its 1080i50 encodes and DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics – however, come the Series Two Blu-ray we wouldn't mind a few more extras than are included here.



## Orange is the New Black: Season One

Lionsgate → Region B BD  
£40 Approx



Netflix continues its run of success with original programming with this superb new series about life in a low-security

women's prison. Impressive right from the off with its astutely-judged mix of drama and comedy, *Orange is the New Black* is one of the strongest debut seasons of any show we can remember since *Game of Thrones* – and we can't wait to see where it goes from here. And as well as looking and sounding better than it does via Netflix's VOD service, this Blu-ray set also benefits from two chat-tracks, four featurettes and a gag reel.



## Mammon: Series One

Arrow Films: Nordic Noir → R2 DVD  
£25 Approx



Another month, another Scandinavian crime series, and while this one fails to reach the same heights as *The Killing* or *The Bridge*, it's still an enjoyably

twisty tale of insider trading and bloody murder. This DVD release is typical of those that make up Arrow's Nordic Noir label, splitting its six episodes across two discs with (sadly) no extra features whatsoever. The good news is that the anamorphic 1.78:1 transfers do a fine job of replicating the stylishly gloomy photography and the Dolby Digital 5.1 mixes (stereo tracks are also included) are pleasingly atmospheric.



# These walkers have been hobbled

It may look good, but when it comes to storytelling this 3D 'toon is truly prehistoric

## → WALKING WITH DINOSAURS: THE 3D MOVIE

It's been 11 years since the last instalment of the BBC series of the same name, but the success of the live show has saved the *Walking with Dinosaurs* brand from extinction. As such, it was hardly surprising to learn that a feature-film was going into production. What is a surprise, though, is just how far removed the film is from the concept of the original series...

Where the *Walking with Dinosaurs* TV series used CG effects to bring the prehistoric creatures back to life in an informative context, this flick is little more than an update of the old *Land Before Time* cartoons with all-new CG visuals.

Quite how much the finished film resembles the original pitch is unclear, but it's painfully clear that it has been the subject of excessive studio tinkering. Evidence includes the addition of pointless live-action scenes that bookend the story and the late addition of voice-over dialogue for all of the dinosaurs (with no lip-movements to match the dialogue the film ends up giving the impression that dinosaurs were all telepathic – something that certainly doesn't tally with the franchise's original educational origins).

It's actually possible to get a taste of the original concept of the film with the 'Cretaceous Cut' included on this Blu-ray. It strips away the live-action material and dialogue, but even this can't stop *Walking with Dinosaurs: The 3D Movie* from feeling like a missed opportunity to do something really unique, rather than churning out another tame CG 'toon aimed at the most undemanding viewers.



'What do you call a one-eyed dinosaur? Doyouthinkhesaurus!'

**Picture:** Unsurprisingly, the Blu-ray's 2.40:1 1080p encode looks spectacular in both its 3D and 2D guises. While the stereoscopic version isn't particularly 'in-your-face', it does add plenty of depth to the landscapes, and both presentations (derived from the same MVC encode) appear bright, colourful and sharply rendered.

**Audio:** The film's dialogue grates (and isn't exactly well integrated into the rest of the mix), but elsewhere the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is a delight. From a forest fire (Chapters 8 and 9) to a walk across a frozen lake (Chapter 22), the track makes expansive use of the 5.1 soundstage. Meanwhile, the duelling dinos (Chapter 20) reveal thunderous bass effects.

**Extras:** In addition to the alternate 'Cretaceous Cut' (in both 2D and 3D), the single-disc Blu-ray includes an interactive guide to the prehistoric creatures featured in the film, a set-top game, a trivia track and the trailers (in 2D and 3D).



### HCC VERDICT

**Walking with Dinosaurs: The 3D Movie**

→ 20th Century Fox  
→ All-region BD → £28 Approx

**WE SAY:** Only the youngest viewers will enjoy this prehistoric cartoon

Movie ★★☆☆☆☆

Picture ★★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★★

**Overall** ★★☆☆☆☆



# Vincent Price silences his critics

The horror legend finds much ado about murder in the works of Shakespeare

## → THEATRE OF BLOOD

Behind all of the poetic language, William Shakespeare clearly had a bit of a sadistic streak. Almost all of his plays feature brutal murders and other transgressive acts of violence – something this wickedly funny 1973 black comedy celebrates with its tale of a hammy actor taking his revenge on the theatre critics who belittled him, murdering them using methods lifted directly from The Bard's plays.

As inventively grisly and wittily literate as the film is, it would all be for naught if not for Vincent Price's stupendous turn as the murderous Edward Lionheart. The actor clearly relished the chance to get away from the B-movie dialogue he was usually given, instead reciting whole passages from Shakespeare's works. Surrounding Price is an equally adept supporting cast including Diana Rigg, Ian Hendry, Robert Morely, Arthur Lowe and Eric Sykes, who seem just as happy to join in the fun – no matter how icky it gets (poodle pie anyone?).

**Picture:** The Blu-ray's restored AVC 1.66:1 1080p encode is taken from a HD master supplied by MGM, transferred from a new 35mm interpositive. It's not the most polished HD encode you'll ever see, but image fidelity is generally good and print damage is thankfully kept to a minimum.

Indeed, the most obvious flaws in the image, such as fluctuations in sharpness and density, appear to relate to the source material. And there are no technical issues with the disc encode itself.



The cast prepare for yet another hair-raising experience



**Audio:** The LPCM 2.0 dual-mono mix was made from the restored mono optical soundtrack negative and is as good as you could expect given its heritage. Dialogue, music

and Foley effects all offer reasonable dynamic range and serve the movie perfectly well – just don't go in with any unreasonable expectations of sonic perfection and you'll enjoy it just fine.

**Extras:** The members of comedy troupe The League of Gentlemen provide a fun chat-track that doesn't necessarily tell you as much about the making of the film as it does about their love for it. Also included are lengthy interviews with Vincent Price's daughter Victoria, film historian David Del Vale, actress Madeline Smith and composer Michael J. Lewis.

## HCC VERDICT

### Theatre of Blood

→ Arrow Video → Region B BD/R2 DVD → £23 Approx

**WE SAY:** A fine hi-def outing for this much-loved British horror comedy. Encore! Encore!

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

## Nosferatu the Vampyre

BFI → Region B BD  
£23 Approx



This hi-def release of Werner Herzog's 1979 remake of the silent horror classic bodes well for the BFI's upcoming Blu-ray boxset of the director's work. Not only does the disc feature

exquisitely restored presentations of both the German and English versions of the film (shot separately in each language, rather than simply dubbed), it also includes some fascinating extra features as well. Best of these is an in-depth commentary by Herzog and film critic Norman Hill that finds the filmmaker discussing his relationship with Klaus Kinski and the problems of shooting an army of rats...



## Sisters

Arrow Video → Region B BD/R2 DVD  
£23 Approx



Brian De Palma's 1973 outing sees the director make the move away from comedies and embracing his love of thrillers (particularly those of Alfred Hitchcock). While not as polished as his later efforts, *Sisters* still benefits hugely from the director's experimental style and a typically twisted tale of terror. In addition to an authentically grainy AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode and restored LPCM mono audio, Arrow's disc is loaded with extra features, including a retrospective documentary, cast and crew interviews and a (slightly rushed) run through De Palma's filmography to date.



## The Phantom of the Opera

101 Films → Region B BD  
£16 Approx



This 1989 adaption of Gaston Leroux's Gothic chiller loads on the gore as Robert Englund takes a break from playing Freddy Krueger to become a skin-flaying Phantom. Despite a rather superfluous time-jumping setup, the end result is an enjoyable horror flick that has stood the test of time better than horror legend Dario Argento's ludicrous 1998 effort. While this Blu-ray is disappointingly devoid of extras, it delivers an appealing 1.85:1-framed 1080p encode that makes the most of the grisly makeup effects, as well as an efficient LPCM 2.0 soundtrack.





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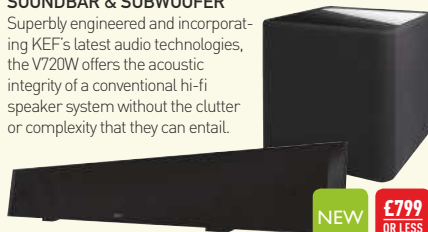
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★★★★★

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**Sony KDL-40W905A** → £1,400 ★★★★★

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A new panel design has given Samsung's plasma tech a much needed injection of brightness and contrast. The result is a premium bigscreen display that constantly wows. *HCC #221*

**Sony KDL-65X9005A** → £5,000 ★★★★★

Sony's first-gen 65in UHD panel is a cracker, offering pin-sharp visuals and brilliant Passive 3D. Blacks aren't best-in-breed, though. *HCC #230*

**Sony KDL-50W829** → £900 ★★★★★

Impressively affordable, Sony's 50in LED stands out courtesy of brilliant motion handling and sharp Full HD imagery. The new 2014 user interface offers a few Smart tricks, too. *HCC #233*

**Panasonic TX-P42GT60** → £1,150 ★★★★★

This mid-range plasma still carries much of the technology found on Panasonic's higher-end PDPs, and delivers finessed, film-friendly Full HD visuals. Not very stylish, though. *HCC #226*



NEW ENTRY

**Finlux 50F8075-T** → £600 ★★★★★

The best screen we've seen yet from the direct-retail corp, this 50-incher matches its affordability with a great user interface and solid, but not awe-inspiring, HD visuals. *HCC #234*

**Toshiba 84L9363DB** → £7,000 ★★★★★

An 84in 4K screen for only £7,000 – this Tosh is certainly a bargain. Native 4K impresses in terms of clarity and colour punch, but motion and upscaling can be bettered. *HCC #231*



NEW ENTRY

**Sony KDL-55W955** → £1,600 ★★★★★

Top of the Japanese giant's 1080p line up, the W955 offers excellent motion handling and great sonics, but is held back by backlight uniformity errors and sluggish operation. *HCC #234*

## TECH INFO: TELEVISIONS



**Plasma or LCD?:** The TV market is increasingly dominated by LED-lit LCD screens that are much, much thinner than traditional cold cathode fluorescent lamp (CCFL) screens. For 42in and above, plasma display panels (PDPs) come into play, although LED screens up to 90ins are also hitting the high street – and 85in 4K panels are also on offer. Plasma screens generally offer superior black levels, better viewing angles and less 3D crosstalk, but less brightness and more energy consumption. There's also a limited choice – only Samsung, LG and Panasonic are selling plasma TVs in the UK, and the latter will soon stop.



**Active or Passive:** At the beginning of the 3D revolution, most TVs featured the Active system that uses relatively expensive, powered 3D specs to deliver Full HD images to each eye. Passive 3D TVs, which are increasingly common and now sold by LG, Philips, Toshiba, Sony, and Panasonic, have a filter over the screen and use non-powered specs with polarising filters. The glasses are cheap as chips, but the resolution of Full HD 3D is halved to 540 lines horizontally (but remains at 1,920 vertically). Glasses-free 3D is in its infancy, with just Toshiba's ZL2 on sale.

## TOP 5 BLU-RAY MOVIES

**Fast & Furious 6: Extended Action Packed Edition**

This is pure escapism on a cracking BD disc – the car acrobatics and rapid-fire fist-fights are delivered with pin-sharp 2.40:1 visuals and a precision-steered soundmix.

★★★★★

**Pacific Rim 3D**

While the lack of a 7.1 mix is disappointing, Guillermo del Toro's monster mash still delivers demo-worthy hi-def visuals in both its 2D and 3D incarnations. It also comes loaded with fantastic extras.

★★★★★

**Man of Steel 3D**

Looking for a lossless soundtrack that is guaranteed to push your audio setup to its absolute limits? Then do yourself (and your home cinema) a favour and pick up Superman's latest cinematic outing.

★★★★★

**Rush**

This Formula One biopic is simply magnificent, both in terms of production values/performances and its thrilling DTS-HD 5.1 mix. The BD hosts a nice selection of extras, too – an essential disc for petrolheads.

★★★★★

**Gravity 3D**

Alfonso Cuarón's sci-fi flick rewrites the rulebook on movie sound design, and stakes a claim to the 3D crown. A disc you'll return to again and again when you want to test your system – nice extras, too.

★★★★★



## Top 10 BLU-RAY PLAYERS

All prices are approx and may have changed

**1** **Oppo BDP-103EU** → £500 ★★★★★  
Oppo's first deck for two years was worth waiting for. The universal BDP-103EU features a class-leading build and all manner of bonus goodies, including twin HDMI inputs. AV performance is faultless, and the onscreen menus are superb. A new model, the £600 BDP-103D, adds Darbee Visual Presence processing for you to play with. HCC #215/#228

**2** **Sony BDP-S790** → £240 ★★★★★  
This range-topping deck represents a bargain AV purchase. As well as its 4K upscaling, the Sony delivers BDs and DVDs with aplomb, spins SACDs and offers twin HDMI outputs. HCC #210

**3** **Oppo BDP-105D** → £1,000 ★★★★★  
This heavyweight deck builds upon the premium picture performance of the BDP-103D with a wealth of audiophile upgrades – if you're serious about music, check it out. HCC #234

**4** **Marantz UD7007** → £1,000 ★★★★★  
Marantz's top-line player doesn't bother itself with feature fads like 4K upscaling, preferring to offer faultless BD playback, music streaming (including FLAC) and balanced outputs. HCC #220

**5** **Pioneer BDP-450** → £230 ★★★★★  
An affordable universal player, the BDP-450 ignores analogue outputs and concentrates solely on the digital age. Well-built and an assured performer. HCC #219

**6** **Denon DBT-3313UD** → £900 ★★★★★  
As a 'transport', this universal deck lacks built-in decoders and analogue outs, but partner it with one of the brand's AVRs via Denon Link HD and you'll be rewarded. HCC #217

**7** **Panasonic DMP-BDT500** → £300 ★★★★★  
Panasonic's range-topper loves your Blu-ray collection. HD images are sharp and fluid and it doubles as a great Smart hub. The touchpad remote is a bit tricky, though. HCC #208

**8** **Sony BDP-S5100** → £140 ★★★★★  
Smaller than many BD decks, Sony's 'Sense of Quartz'-styled spinner offers SACD compatibility and plenty of VOD content. The menu system needs streamlining, though. HCC #222

**9** **Panasonic DMP-BDT330** → £200 ★★★★★  
New for 2013, this slim-line spinner is a solid choice, although the Viera Connect portal is beginning to feel a bit out-dated and the DMP-BDT500 (above) offers better features. HCC #221

**10** **Pioneer BDP-160** → £130 ★★★★★  
The successor to the BDP-150 adds integrated Wi-Fi, making media file playback simpler. The Smart hub is still practically empty, but SACD support softens the blow. HCC #227

## TECH INFO: BLU-RAY PLAYERS

**Matching your deck to your AV receiver:** Blu-ray decks are designed to deliver top-notch images but Blu-ray is also about enjoying superior quality sound. When choosing a player, bear in mind the connectivity and decoding features of your AV receiver. If you're still using an older model that doesn't offer HDMI inputs, then you'll need a Blu-ray player with multichannel analogue audio outputs to enjoy decoded hi-res surround sound formats. Similarly, older but still HDMI-equipped receivers may not be able to cope with 3D video signals, in which case you'll need a deck with dual HDMI outputs – one channelling audio to your receiver amp, the other piping video direct to your TV.

**What about the PlayStation?:** Sony's console still represents an easy path to hi-def heaven. For a low-budget home cinema system, the £200 PS3 Slim (160GB) makes a decent choice – especially if you like playing games (in 3D, if you fancy it). Control via a joystick is a pain, though, and the console runs more noisily than most BD spinners. The recent PS4 is a much better gaming machine, but currently doesn't offer 3D BD (or CD!) playback.



## DEMO DELIGHT

**Prometheus:** Ridley Scott's return to the sci-fi genre is a treat for your senses, with a crystal-clear HD image and spine-tingling sonics. The 3D presentation of this outer-space horror is impressive too – it oozes depth and proves utterly immersive

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## TOP 10 PROJECTORS

All prices are approx  
and may have changed**Sony VPL-VW500ES** → £8,800

★★★★★

Sony's second-gen 4K projector is around half the price of the VPL-VW1000ES (below) and comes with HDMI 2.0 chipper and Triluminos colour wizardry. Auditioning this class PJ is a no-brainer. *HCC #228*

**JVC X500R** → £5,000 ★★★★★

Armed with a more adept third-generation of the brand's proprietary e-shift technology, the X500R continues JVC's winning ways – contrast rich, sharp and full of tweaks. *HCC #232*

**Sony VPL-VW1000ES** → £17,000 ★★★★★

Sony's flagship projector is an absolute triumph, giving film fanatics the chance to upscale their Blu-ray collection to 4K resolution. The start of a new era? We hope so! *HCC #209*

**SIM2 Super Lumis** → £37,000 ★★★★★

With a more potent lamp than its Lumis forebear, this light-cannon from SIM2 costs an arm and leg, and is only Full HD, but delivers an astonishing level of performance. *HCC #227*

**Epson EH-TW7200** → £1,900 ★★★★★

Priced to appeal to those unable to dabble in the £3,000 market, Epson's mid-ranger is a great purchase. No frame interpolation on offer, but colours, contrast and brightness impress. *HCC #232*

**Sony VPL-HW55ES** → £2,800 ★★★★★

Not one of Sony's 4K models, but this keenly priced Full HD projector delivers where it counts, with solid calibration options, simple setup and brilliant 2D visuals. No 12V trigger. *HCC #230*

**Epson EH-TW9200W** → £3,000 ★★★★★

A brilliant mid-range projector with wireless HD transmission and ISF certification, yet the noise generated when running in 'Normal' lamp mode could be a concern for some. *HCC #231*

**Optoma HD30** → £1,100 ★★★★★

A step up from the HD25 (below), this claims an increased contrast ratio and again offers a pleasing bigscreen performance. UI could be better, and zoom is somewhat limited. *HCC #233*

**Optoma HD25** → £800 ★★★★★

Optoma's projector provides bright, stable Full HD 3D (with the Active glasses and RF transmitter included) and great-looking 2D visuals for a pittance. A bit noisy. *HCC #220*

**BenQ W1070** → £700 ★★★★★

A brilliant bargain proposition, the BenQ W1070 packs a surprising amount of useful features, including ISF certification. You'll need to fork out extra for 3D glasses, though. *HCC #220*

## TECH INFO: PROJECTORS



**Installation:** Although projectors can be temporarily placed on a cupboard, stand or shelf situated at the rear of the room (use the adjustable feet on its base to level the image so that it aligns with the screen), a much better long-term solution is to mount it on your ceiling with an appropriate bracket. Projectors can be quite heavy, though, so it's important to ensure that the bracket is attached firmly – ideally, it should be secured to a joist. Position your PJ so that an imaginary line from its lens to the opposite side of the room hits the screen exactly half-way along its width. The location of your screen should therefore dictate where your projector is. A decent tape-measure or laser pointer will help you to determine the position.

**Throw distance:** Throw distance specifies the distance between the projector and screen for a focused image of given size. As the vast majority of projectors are equipped with a zoom lens, minimum and maximum throw distances are often specified – say, 3.01m to 6.08m for a 100in. 16:9 image. Shorter throw distances are ideal for smaller rooms, and longer ones for larger rooms. Simple.

**Throw ratio:** Sometimes, a manufacturer will quote a throw ratio rather than a throw distance. This is basically the throw distance divided by the image width. To get the projected image size, divide the distance between projector and screen by the specified figure. Once again, the inclusion of a zoom lens means that upper and lower figures are usually specified.

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## Top 10 SPEAKERS

All prices are approx  
and may have changed**B&W 683 Theatre 5.1** → £2,750

The first step on the floorstanding ladder in B&W's speaker stable, the revamped 600 Series incorporates new tweeter and bass driver designs and offers absurd value for money. Not the prettiest cabinets, but you really won't care. *HCC #234*

**KEF R Series 7.1** → £6,500 ★★★★★

A 7.1 array mixing dipolar and direct surrounds, this authoritative package takes its cues from KEF's Blade concept speaker and offers faultless, largescale home cinema sonics. *HCC #217*

**Bowers & Wilkins MT-60D** → £2,000 ★★★★★

This 5.1 set sits at the upper end of the sub/sat market, but buyers are rewarded by a potent performance, with the PVID subwoofer dazzling in particular. They look lovely, too. *HCC #212*

**Q Acoustics Q2000i** → £600 ★★★★★

Another superior sub/sat array from the sonic wizards at Q Acoustics, this marries some surprisingly full-bodied satellite speakers to an easy-to-accommodate 2 x 6in sub. *HCC #211*

**Wharfedale Diamond 100 HCP** → £950 ★★★★★

Yet another excellent affordable package from Wharfedale, the Diamond 100 HCP offers a sound quality beyond what you might expect from its sub-£1,000 ticket. Maturely styled. *HCC #224*

**Kreisel Sound Quattro 7.2** → £8,500 ★★★★★

Mixing two mammoth woofers with some surprisingly manageable multi-tweeter speakers (including TriFX surrounds) this US package is supremely assured. *HCC #232*

**Artcoustic Spitfire SL 7.2** → £17,000 ★★★★★

Slimmed-down cabinets now even easier to install on-wall or behind a screen, with a multi-driver design ensuring they're easy to drive to high SPLs. Ideal for dedicated rooms. *HCC #233*

**Tannoy Precision Series 5.1** → £4,450 ★★★★★

These speakers' classic look belies the brand's hi-fi heritage, but this multichannel setup works wonders with movies, too – a rich, large and dynamic sound is on offer. *HCC #226*

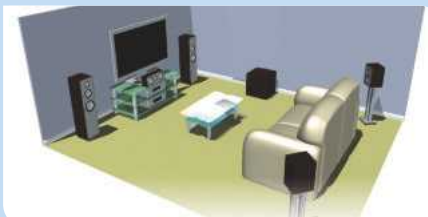
**Monitor Audio Radius R90HTI** → £1,500 ★★★★★

The long-loved Radius speakers have been revamped with new drivers and rear ports, and this 5.1 set provides a clear, detailed sound with plenty of heft. Looks good in white, too. *HCC #230*

**Roth OLi RA 5.1** → £850 ★★★★★

A floorstanding array with neat design and reassuring build, this value-for-money pack delivers an impressive slice of scale to go with its full-range prowess. *HCC #233*

## TECH INFO: SPEAKERS



**Centre speaker:** Handles most of the dialogue and onscreen effects. Should be positioned above or below the screen as close to it as possible. Of course, if you're using a projector screen, it should ideally be placed behind it.

**Front speakers:** Left and right speakers should be positioned either side of the screen, in line with the centre. Turn the speakers in slightly to face the listener if there isn't an even movement of sound across the front of the room.

**Subwoofer:** Can be positioned wherever it sounds best or can be tucked out of sight due to the non-directional nature of low-frequency signals. Be aware that close positioning in corners or next to walls can create a boomy effect.

**Surrounds:** Position alongside the listener, pointing in or slightly behind the ears for a good surround effect. The back wall is not a good position for surrounds – it is, in fact, where you should locate the sixth and seventh speakers (rears) in a traditional 7.1 array.

## DEMO DELIGHT

**Man of Steel:** Zack Snyder's reboot is a great BD for proving a speaker package's mettle. Head to the Smallville battle and be dazzled by a 7.1 mix with huge dynamics, incredible bass and remarkable surround steering – the latter most evident when General Zod removes his helmet and is overpowered by swirling, dizzying sounds.

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## TOP 10 AV RECEIVERS/AV PROCESSORS

All prices are approx  
and may have changed**Sony STR-DA5800ES** → £2,200

★★★★★

Sony's follow up to the STR-DA5700ES continues to pack handy features (built-in Ethernet switching, a unique video-on-demand platform), ups the channels to 9.2, and brings a suite of great post-processing modes. *HCC #223*

**Anthem MRX-510** → £1,700 ★★★★★

The Canadian brand returns in style with an AVR that ignores streaming/networking features but boasts supreme room EQ and eats movie soundtracks for breakfast. *HCC #232*

**Arcam AVR750** → £4,000 ★★★★★

If all you want from an AV receiver is vast power and effortless performance, this high-end 7.1-channel beast is tailored to you. Little bonus features beyond audio networking. *HCC #225*

**Krell Foundation** → £6,500 ★★★★★

One of the US marque's more affordable offerings, the Foundation is a seven-channel processor that delivers an insightful, smooth and epic sound. And it looks fab. *HCC #224*

**Yamaha CX-A5000** → £2,500 ★★★★★

Part of Yamaha's new high-end separates line (you can match it with the MX-A5000 amp), this 11-channel processor sounds clean, precise and offers a dizzying range of features. *HCC #228*

**Marantz AV8801** → £2,500 ★★★★★

The brand's high-end 11-channel processor offers balanced outputs and heavyweight engineering. Partner it with the MM8807 power amp for a supreme performance. *HCC #220*

**Onkyo TX-NR929** → £1,000 ★★★★★

You get a lot for your cash with this 9.2-channel model – built-in Bluetooth and Wi-Fi join THX Select2 certification and excellent connectivity. Creates a large, full-bodied soundstage. *HCC #231*

**Marantz NR1604** → £550 ★★★★★

The third generation of Marantz's slim-line AVR continues its living room-friendly work – easy to operate, fun-sounding, FLAC/Airplay-capable and boasting a great form factor. *HCC #233*

**Pioneer SC-LX87** → £2,000 ★★★★★

A multi-talented 9.2-channel AVR that excels in terms of clarity and scale. Wi-Fi is via a supplied adaptor, and the UI is beginning to look dated compared to the competition. *HCC #230*

**Yamaha RX-V675** → £500 ★★★★★

The new low/mid-range RX-V675 digs out all the sonic details of your Blu-ray platters and places them across the soundstage. A great-sounding AVR at a good price. Primitive UI. *HCC #225*

## TECH INFO: AV RECEIVERS



**Tackling new heights:** You may find your AV receiver offering Dolby Pro-Logic IIz, Audyssey DSX or DTS Neo: X post-processing – possibly all three. All of these can deliver two further Front Height channels, with the aim of adding weight and control to the front soundstage, particularly in terms of lifting the centre channel and adding scale to vertical surround effects – rainfall for example. The catch is that you will need to add two new physical speakers, mounted near your ceiling above the regular left and right channel cabinets, and make use of two of the receiver's channels of amplification, which could mean forgoing a second stereo zone or rear surrounds speakers. Note that the Audyssey and DTS modes also cater for Front Wide speakers (pictured above), but this idea seems to be gaining less traction within the industry.

**How much power?:** Many of the mass-market AV receiver manufacturers are involved in a specifications race to see who can say their model is the most powerful, which can be confusing for consumers. For instance, both Krell's £7,000 S-1500 seven-channel power amp and Yamaha's £500 RX-V675 both claim 7 x 150W – the important part is that Krell's figure is into an eight-ohm load with all channels driven, and that Yamaha's is with one channel into a four-ohm load, which is hardly a real-world situation. The best advice is ignore the numbers game and get a demo of your desired AVR with the same, or similar, speakers that you intend to partner it with.

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## Top 10 SUBWOOFERS

All prices are approx  
& may have changed

- 1**  


**Bowers & Wilkins DB1 → £3,250**  
★★★★★  
Featuring a bipolar arrangement of 12in drivers powered by 1,000W of amplification, B&W's stylish flagship sub is a faultless performer, offering both musicality and sheer muscle. Fit to partner the finest of speakers. *HCC #197*
- 2**  


**SVS SB-2000 → £650** ★★★★★  
With a new 12in driver and revamped 500W Sledge DSP amplifier, this mid-sized woofer offers immense value for money and imbibes BDs with potent LFE. Easily recommended. *HCC #233*
- 3**  


**JL Audio Fathom F212 → £5,900** ★★★★★  
The US brand arrives in the UK in style – this 2 x 12in, 3,000W brute not only looks gorgeous, it's capable of a mindblowing performance. Got a big room? Get one of these! *HCC #214*
- 4**  


**Tannoy TS2.12 → £550** ★★★★★  
The TS2.12 is easily Tannoy's best woofer yet – using a 12in driver (opposite a passive 12in cone) and 500W amp to deliver a rich, bass performance. Affordable and good-looking, too. *HCC #208*
- 5**  


**REL S-5 → £1,600** ★★★★★  
A step up from the T series (below), this 12in model is large and weighty, with a performance level to match. Fast and tight but capable of dropping very low indeed. *HCC #234*
- 6**  


**REL T-7 → £650** ★★★★★  
The T-7 uses an 8in driver in tandem with a 10in passive radiator, and features simultaneous speaker-level and LFE inputs and Class A/B amplification. An excellent all-rounder. *HCC #223*
- 7**  


**Bowers & Wilkins PVID → £1,200** ★★★★★  
On of the coolest-looking subs on the planet, B&W's revamped PVI uses DSP trickery to craft an opulent low-end performance. The touch-sensitive OLED display is pure class. *HCC #212*
- 8**  


**REL Habitat 1 → £1,300** ★★★★★  
With its LongBow wireless system and wall-mountable design, REL's newest woofer is aimed at those seeking discreet bass. Twin 6.5in drivers work fast and with considerable grip. *HCC #231*
- 9**  


**SVS SB12-NSD → £650** ★★★★★  
A 12in driver squeezed into the smallest enclosure possible, the SB12-NSD packs a 400W 'Sledge' amp and offers a weighty yet fast and accurate sound. Looks a bit bland, though. *HCC #223*
- 10**  


**Quadral Qube 10 → £525** ★★★★★  
A gorgeous-looking woofer with a build quality that belies its lowly price tag, the Qube 10 takes Quadral's musical heritage and delivers a controlled, poised performance. *HCC #223*

## TECH INFO



**Why use more than one sub?:** Using two subwoofers (or perhaps four) should, in theory, bring huge rewards in terms of bass performance. But remember that LFE is a tricky beast to control. Running two subs may simply double problems in your room like room boom and suck-outs, where outgoing and reflected bass sounds cancel each other out. If you have some flexibility in where you place subwoofers, trial and error may well throw up some interesting results. The acoustics wizard Floyd E Toole (his book *Sound Reproduction: The Acoustics and Psychoacoustics of Loudspeakers and Rooms* is fine bedtime reading) suggests one LFE sub to either side of the room may be best for accuracy while placing them in the front corners would be best for overall bass power. Yet there is no hard and fast rule as to what will work best for every room, and you may find that simply using one (large) subwoofer is preferable as it's the easiest to get sounding right.

## DEMO DELIGHT

**Oblivion:** Joseph Kosinski's sophomore sci-fi flick looks spectacular on Blu-ray, and its visual panache is matched by a 7.1 audio mix that particularly impresses with its low-end extension. The subwoofer channel here is regularly employed, dropping deep and loud to accompany everything from explosions and weapons fire to the roaring engines of Tom Cruise's recon ship. Love your lows? Then love this.

## Top 5 HD GAMES

**Dead Rising 3**

Killing hundreds of zombies with an outrageous range of weapons is the order of the day in this delightfully demented sequel. Certainly not the best-looking Xbox One title, but probably the most fun

★★★★★

**Forza Motorsport 5**

This game's headline trick is delivering its huge car collection and decent selection of tracks in wonderfully detailed 1080p at a silky smooth 60fps. That it's not quite perfect – dodgy AI, for a start – is less important.

★★★★★

**Grand Theft Auto V**

Rockstar's newest slice of car-jacking, gun-wielding fun is absolutely massive in both scale and ambition – a big-budget game that will leave a big grin on your face. Graphically gorgeous, and the 5.1 mix isn't bad, either.

★★★★★

**Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag**

This sequel takes to the high seas for piratical fun, with an enormous open world, absorbing gameplay, beautiful graphics and a soundtrack packed with well-realised ambient effects.

★★★★★

**Tomb Raider**

Lara Croft returns in this fantastic reboot that breathes new life into the third-person action genre. With a great story and quality graphics and sonic design it feels like a Hollywood blockbuster. Just with a joypad.

★★★★★

## TOP 10 ACCESSORIES

All prices are approx and may have changed

- 1 Now TV box → £10 ★★★★★**  
 An unqualified bargain, this Wi-Fi VOD streamer from Sky (and built upon Roku hardware) brings BBC iPlayer, Demand 5 and the Roku Channel Store to any HDMI-toting telly, plus subscription access to Sky Movies and Sky Sports. The quality of the adaptive bitrate streaming is impressive, and the £10 tag gets you P&P and an HDMI cable. *HCC #226*
- 2 Simple Audio Listen → £400 ★★★★★**  
 Stereo Bluetooth/PC speakers with dollops of cool style, the Listens offer the kind of potent, full-bodied performance that you'd expect from their price tag. *HCC #232*
- 3 Devolo dLAN 500 AV Wireless+ → £130 ★★★★★**  
 Combining Powerline Ethernet distribution with integrated Wi-Fi, this starter kit is a great purchase if you're looking to extend and simplify your home network. *HCC #222*
- 4 Sony MDR-HW700DS → £450 ★★★★★**  
 Comfy cans supplied with an HDMI-toting surround processor, enabling multichannel audio to be fed to a virtual 9.1-channel soundstage. The effect is superb – great for late nights. *HCC #234*
- 5 Philips Hue → £180 ★★★★★**  
 These Wi-Fi enabled lightbulbs might be expensive (this £180 starter pack includes two, plus the Wi-Fi bridge) but making your own multicoloured lighting scheme is a blast. *HCC #220*
- 6 Roku 3 Streaming Player → £100 ★★★★★**  
 This step-up streamer builds upon the cute design and simplified operation of the Roku LT with welcome additions including SD card support, headphone input and 1080p video. Neat. *HCC #230*
- 7 Philips Screeneo HDP1590 → £1,500 ★★★★★**  
 Neatly designed, the Screeneo offers ultra-short throw projection thrills, albeit at 720p (and the DVB tuner is SD). Punchy speakers and networking skills complete a nice package. *HCC #233*
- 8 Microsoft Xbox One → £430 ★★★★★**  
 Not as graphically potent as the PS4 (below) but the new Xbox lives up to its billing as a home entertainment hub – voice control and multi-tasking tricks prove very useful. *HCC #230*
- 9 One For All Simple 4 → £22 ★★★★★**  
 A neatly styled and backlit universal remote control, One For All's budget zapper can tackle up to four devices at once and offers easy setup and handy shortcut keys. *HCC #220*
- 10 Sony PlayStation 4 → £350 ★★★★★**  
 The PS4 offers a killer gaming experience, with the under-the-hood power resulting in great-looking games. Yet it has a few foibles. Wanna play 3D BDs? You'll be disappointed. *HCC #229*

## TECH INFO: MEDIA PLAYERS



**What about my TV?:** Many flatscreen TVs from the major brands (Sony, Samsung, Panasonic, LG, Toshiba and Sharp) also incorporate media player functionality, using Ethernet or Wi-Fi to stream from your home network, or from plugged-in USB drives. Most modern Blu-ray players offer this, too. However, file support is rarely as extensive as on dedicated devices from the likes of Western Digital and A.C. Ryan, and our experience shows some are more adept at playback from USB than over a network. Nor (obviously) is a TV or BD player portable. If your media collection extends beyond JPEGs and MP3s into lossless audio rips and esoteric HD video formats, then a standalone player is a good investment.

**Storage:** You can, if you really want, store all your files on a plethora of USB drives, or on your PC, but it's best to get a NAS (Network Attached Storage) device for simplified sharing of your media across a network with



multiple players, such as one from Netgear's ReadyNAS range (pictured). These dedicated devices often offer RAID array file backup, and are managed via browser software. Storage capacity can be anything from 1TB to 12TB and beyond.

## TOP 5 BLU-RAY BOX SETS

**Game of Thrones: The Complete Third Season**

More fantastic fantasy TV delivered on Blu-ray – as with previous seasons, the AV quality here ensures the show's big-budget bombast shines through.

★★★★★

**The Walking Dead: The Complete Third Season**

The best series of zombie TV yet, this third run shuffles onto Blu-ray with authentic 1.78:1 HD imagery and atmospheric and spine-tingling DTS-HD MA sonics. Roll on S4.

★★★★★

**Universal Classic Monsters: The Essential Collection**

Bag yourself eight great monster movies given a thorough cleanup by Universal Studios – and marvel at the sheer brilliance of *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* in 3D.

★★★★★

**James Dean: Ultimate Collector's Edition**

Warner Home Video has given *East of Eden*, *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Giant* 4K restorations from their original camera negatives. The result is that these 1950s classics look fab.

★★★★★

**Doctor Who: The Complete Seventh Series**

Audio commentaries, short episode prequels and featurettes are among the extras on this set collecting 15 episodes of TARDIS-based fun. The 1080i transfers impress, too.

★★★★★



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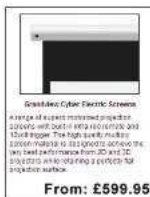
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70" Wide	(80" x 45") - (203 x 114 cm)	92"	2530 x 145 x 135
80" Wide	(102" x 52") - (234 x 132 cm)	108"	2835 x 145 x 135
90" Wide	(104" x 58") - (267 x 150 cm)	120"	3159 x 145 x 135
100" Wide	(120" x 68") - (305 x 173 cm)	137"	3538 x 145 x 135

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## TOP 5 PVRs


**Virgin Media TiVo, £subscription**

This triple-tuner PVR offers ultimate recording flexibility, useful features – you can undelete deleted shows! – and awesome TiVo functionality. A no brainer if you're in a cable area

★★★★★


**Sky+HD, £subscription**

Sky's channel choice is second-to-none and its twin tuner 2TB PVR is a perfect partner. The recent EPG tweak is welcome and Anytime (the push VOD service) is brilliant for catching up on new movies

★★★★★


**Panasonic DMR-HW220, £250**

Panasonic's PVR mixes a 1TB hard drive with its Smart Viera functionality and media streaming – so at £250 it's an absolute steal, regardless of the uninspired design

★★★★★


**Pure Avalon 300R Connect, 1TB, £350**

Pure's debut Freeview+ HD offering is assured. While it can't match YouView for VOD content, the user interface here is unrivalled and four-way HDMI switching a welcome addition

★★★★★


**Samsung BD-F8500, £300**

This 500GB model marries its Freeview+ PVR to a Wi-Fi-toting 3D Blu-ray player and offers copious catch-up TV options – it's just a shame they aren't integrated into the EPG environment

★★★★★

## TOP 5 SOUNDBARS


**Yamaha YSP-3300, £900**

A slender soundbar/sub duo that offers a very effective virtual surround performance courtesy of Yamaha's Beam driver tech. Connections include four HDMI inputs – but there's no Bluetooth here

★★★★★


**Canton DM 50, £400**

This sturdily built soundbase speaker may lack HDMI inputs but makes up for it with Bluetooth streaming and a full-bodied 2.1-channel performance. Movies and music benefit from clarity and power

★★★★★


**Monitor Audio ASB-2, £1,000**

This premium proposition marries Monitor Audio's C-CAM drivers with AirPlay and DLNA music streaming. Performance is exemplary – powerful and polished in equal measure

★★★★★


**Philips HTL9100, £600**

A soundbar/sub that incorporates two removable side speakers to allow it to become a wireless 5.1 system, this Philips is a neat proposition. Easy to install and with a heavyweight sound

★★★★★


**Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2, £1,650**

This second-generation soundbar offers no separate subwoofer and is hardly cheap, but B&W's audio expertise shows through, and HDMI hookup aids installation

★★★★★

## TOP 5 SYSTEMS


**Panasonic SC-BTT590, £630**

The use of new bamboo/charcoal drivers and noise-shaping tech pays dividends here, with a classy sound quality to match the wealth of features (3D BD, Smart TV and more)

★★★★★


**Samsung HT-F9750W, £1,500**

Samsung's flagship tallboy array uses a vacuum tube pre-amp and offers unique DTS Neo: Fusion seven-channel processing. Powerful, fulsome sound; packed with features

★★★★★


**Harman/Kardon BDS470, £650**

Harman's 2.1 system eschews 'net TV and streaming features, but majors in heavyweight build quality and solid AV performance. We tested a 2.1 iteration – 5.1 is also available

★★★★★


**LG BH8220B, £650**

With its silver finish, this is a suitable one-box system to partner with LG's flatscreen TVs, with a commendable, if slightly lacking in HF finesse, sound. Additional features including CD-ripping to USB. Handy

★★★★★


**Panasonic SC-HTB570, £350**

A commendable slim-line 2.1 system that can also be clicked together to make a soundbar. The punchy wireless subwoofer does a lot of the work. Bluetooth music streaming is onboard

★★★★★

# HOME CINEMA

Choice

## → IN THE NEXT ISSUE

**Bang & Olufsen – how the high-end AV brand plans to tackle 4K**  
**Turning a living room into a media room**  
**Movies and music – the best demo sequences for your system**

## → ON TEST

**DALI Rubicon 5.1 speakers** **Samsung BD-H8900 BD deck/PVR** **Sony KD-65X9005B 4K TV** **Philips Fidelio E5 all-in-one system** **Blu-ray player**  
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**ISSUE**  
**#236 ON SALE**  
**June 26**



## AV RECEIVERS

ONKYO & YAMAHA: 2014 - 2015 MODELS

ONKYO  
TX-NR535  
BLACK | SILVER



ULTRA 4K HD

AIRPLAY

ONKYO  
TX-NR636  
BLACK | SILVER



HQV UPSCALER

WIFI READY!

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TX-NR838  
BLACK | SILVER



YAMAHA  
RX-V377  
BLACK | SILVER

YAMAHA  
RX-V477  
BLACK | SILVER

YAMAHA  
RX-V677  
BLACK | SILVER

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WIRELESS

GRANDVIEW ELECTRIC  
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4K RESOLUTION



EPSON EH-TW6100  
HD PROJECTOR



EPSON EH-TW9200-W  
HD PROJECTOR



SONY VP-VW500  
HD PROJECTOR

## 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGES

SURROUND SOUND: THE MONITOR AUDIO WAY

MONITOR AUDIO  
RADIUS R90 HT1  
BLACK | WHITE | WALNUT

WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2013  
★★★★★  
OCT 2013



0%  
FINANCE  
AVAILABLE

COMPACT YET  
POWERFUL

MONITOR AUDIO  
SILVER 6 AV12  
2 GLOSS | 4 VENEER FINISHES

WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2014  
★★★★★  
MAR 2014



0%  
FINANCE  
AVAILABLE

PURE PERFORMANCE  
NO COMPROMISE

MONITOR AUDIO  
MASS 5.1  
WHITE | BLACK

WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2012



0%  
FINANCE  
AVAILABLE

BEST FOR  
BUDGET

## 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGES

OUR TOP-SELLING SURROUND SOUND PACKAGES

Q ACOUSTICS Q7000i  
BLACK | WHITE

WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2013  
★★★★★  
NOV 2013



0%  
FINANCE  
AVAILABLE

2014 BEST SELLER  
MULTI AWARD  
WINNER

DALI ZENSOR 5 AV 5.1  
BLACK | WHITE | WALNUT

WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2011  
★★★★★



0%  
FINANCE  
AVAILABLE

TRADITIONAL STYLE  
PURE PERFORMANCE

TANNOY MERCURY  
V4i AV 5.1  
MAPLE | DARK WALNUT

WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2011  
★★★★★



0%  
FINANCE  
AVAILABLE

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WHITE | BLACK



0%  
FINANCE  
AVAILABLE

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BESPOKE  
MODIFICATIONS

0%  
FINANCE  
AVAILABLE

0%  
FINANCE  
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GLOSS BLACK



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SIX COLOUR FINISHES



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CLEAR | FROSTED | BLACK



ATACAMA ELITE ECO  
BAMBOO | 3 FINISHES



SPECTRAL CD SHELVING  
CLEAR | FROSTED | BLACK

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**ROKSAN CASPIAN  
M2 CD & AMPLIFIER**  
BLACK | SILVER

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND STYLE  
★★★★★  
OCT 2013



0%  
FINANCE  
AVAILABLE

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND STYLE  
★★★★★  
DEC 2011

**ROKSAN KANDY,  
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BLACK | SILVER



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FINANCE  
AVAILABLE

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND STYLE  
★★★★★  
AWARDS 2010

**YAMAHA AS-500  
AMPLIFIER**  
BLACK | SILVER

**MARANTZ 6005  
CD & AMPLIFIER**  
BLACK | SILVER

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND STYLE  
★★★★★  
MAY 2014



**YAMAHA A-N500  
CD & AMPLIFIER**  
BLACK | SILVER

## HI-FI SPEAKERS

THE LATEST AND GREATEST PAIRS OF LOUDSPEAKERS

**Q ACOUSTICS  
CONCEPT 40**  
BLACK | WHITE

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND STYLE  
★★★★★  
MAY 2014

AWARD-WINNING  
'CONCEPT'  
DESIGN



**MONITOR AUDIO  
SILVER 10**  
2 GLOSS  
4 VENEER FINISHES

BEST FOR  
LARGE ROOMS

**WHARFEDALE  
DIAMOND 121**  
3 FINISHES

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND STYLE  
★★★★★  
OCT 2013



**DALI ZENSOR 1**  
3 FINISHES

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND STYLE  
★★★★★  
AUGUST 2011

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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND STYLE  
★★★★★  
NOV 2012

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND STYLE  
★★★★★  
AWARDS 2012

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND STYLE  
★★★★★  
AWARDS 2013



**AUDIOQUEST  
CINNAMON**  
HDMI CABLE

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND STYLE  
★★★★★  
JAN 2011



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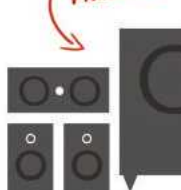


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# POINT OF VIEW

**Richard Stevenson** worries that the sound quality problems that blighted the BBC's *Jamaica Inn* are symptomatic of a lack of respect that broadcasters and manufacturers have for our ears

**WHO WOULD HAVE** thought that Daphne du Maurier's classic yarn *Jamaica Inn*, set in 1820, could cause such a technical kurfuffle in 2014, with the airing of the BBC adapted drama met with the highest number of complaints coming into Broadcasting House since Jeremy Paxman's beard. And the reason? No one could hear a damn word that any of the characters were saying.

Despite the BBC citing 'mumbling' actors, the problem was actually a triumvirate of issues that added up to the least satisfying TV watching experience of the year so far. Yes, the cast had taken method acting to whole new levels, but quite why they felt the characters should speak quietly from the corner of their mouth against a cacophonous background of crashing seas and windy moors remains a mystery. Thespian friends have suggested this was to instil a 'sinister air.' Listen up actors: you can't sound sinister and threatening unless people actually hear what you're saying.

The second issue was Cornish accents so thick they sounded like the actors had a pasty jammed in each jowel. Those who caught the fabulously observed *W1A* on the BBC a few weeks before, with its plot line of the Beeb discriminating against Cornish presenters and Cornwall in general, would have had a wry smile. You can almost hear the production meeting: 'Okay. Yah. Let's really drive the Cornish thing in *Jamaica Inn*. Make sure everyone has the heavy Cornish accent and tell Clare Balding she has got to relocate to Penzance.'

The third part of this sorry tale is the TV hardware industry. It is a fair bet that most of *Jamaica Inn*'s six million viewers were tuned in on a modern flatpanel TV. Tiny speaker drivers and amps that wouldn't jump start a gnat really don't help the intelligibility of dialogue. It is no wonder that market research

whiz GfK predicts over one million soundbars will be sold in the UK this year – with more programmes like *Jamaica Inn* being aired, I reckon that figure will be even higher.

What worries me most is that the BBC was able to air a programme with sound quality that was clearly well below the threshold of fidelity for even the least sonically critical of viewers (blaming it on 'technical reasons'). **This seems like more evidence of an industry-wide attitude that picture quality is more important than sound**, which results in heavy dynamic compression, infrequent 5.1 mixes and a general lack of investment or even thought going into sonic production. Well, that's the UK – thankfully the predominantly pay-TV US market doesn't put up with shoddy quality with quite the inevitable apathy of the British public at large. The big American shows on Sky are generally superb-sounding, available in multichannel mixes and produced to deliver crisp and articulate dialogue. Sure, there aren't many Cornish-based US series (let's face it, they are never going to set 24 in Mousehole) but have you ever heard a proper Alabama accent? As bad as Cornish but with more spittoons and shotguns.

If there is a positive message to derive from the sonic debacle of Daphne's finest, it's that Tony Hall, Director General of the BBC, got involved vocally, albeit criticising just the mumbling actors if not the appalling sound production. But as TVs get thinner and we all get older and with ever more cloth-like ears, one can only hope that sound quality comes back on the agenda for actors, producers and TV manufacturers alike. The alternative just isn't worth listening to ■

*Is the sound quality of broadcast TV up to standard?  
Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)*

**Richard Stevenson's** experience of piracy is currently limited to ripping his collection of 1970s prog rock to MP3. And wearing frilly shirts





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